

THIS SIMIAN WORLD

BY CLARENCE DAY, JR.

IN order that any species of animals may come to rule any planet, two qualities at the very least would seem necessary: some form of desire to urge them on and on, and also adaptability of a thousand kinds to their environment.

So far as adaptability is concerned, we humans are experts. We talk of our "mastery" of nature, which sounds very grand; but the fact is we respectfully adapt ourselves first to her ways. "We attain no power over nature till we learn natural laws, and our lordship depends on the adroitness with which we learn and conform."

Adroitness, however, is merely an ability to win; back of it there must be some spur to make us use our adroitness. Why don't we all die or give up when we're sick of the world? Because the love of life takes the form, in most energized beings, of some longing that pushes them forward, in defeat and in darkness. All creatures, of course, wish to live and perpetuate their species; but those two wishes in themselves evidently do not carry any race far. In addition to these, a race to be great needs some hunger, some itch, to spur it up the hard path we have lately learned to call evolution. The love of toil in the ants, and of craft in cats, are examples (imaginary or not). What other such lust could exert great driving force?

With us is it curiosity, endless interest in one's environment?

Many animals have some curiosity, but "some" is not enough; and in very few is it really a master passion. By a master passion I mean a passion that is your master—some appetite which habitually, day in, day out, makes its sub-

jects forget fatigue or danger, and sacrifice their ease to its gratification. That is the kind of hold that curiosity has on the monkeys.

Imagine a prehistoric prophet observing those beings, and forecasting what kind of civilizations their descendants would build. Any one could have foreseen certain parts of the simians' history—could have guessed that their curiosity would unlock for them, one by one, nature's doors, and—idly—bestow on them stray bits of valuable knowledge; could have pictured them spreading inquiringly all over the globe, stumbling on their inventions—and idly passing on and forgetting them.

To have to learn the same thing over and over again wastes the time of a race. But with simians this is continually necessary, because of their disorder. "Disorder," a prophet would have sighed—"that is one of their handicaps; one that they will never get rid of, whatever it costs. Having so much curiosity makes a race scatterbrained.

"Yes," he would have dismally continued, "it will be a queer mixture; these simians will attain to vast stores of knowledge, in time, that is plain, but, after spending centuries groping to discover some art, in after-centuries they will now and then find it's forgotten. How incredible it would seem on other planets to hear of lost arts.

"There is a strong streak of triviality in them, which you don't see in cats. They won't have fine enough characters to concentrate on the things of most weight. They will talk and think far more of trifles than of what is important. Even when they are reasonably civilized

this will be so. Great discoveries sometimes will fail to be heard of, because *too much else is*; and many will thus disappear, and these men will not know it. If they rescue one such as Mendel's from the dust-heap it will be an exception."

Let me interrupt this lament to say a word for myself and my ancestors. It is easy to blame us as indiscriminating, but we are at least full of zest. And it's well to be interested, eagerly and intensely, in so many things, because there is often no knowing which may turn out important. We don't go around being interested on purpose, hoping to profit by it, but a profit may come. And, anyway, it is generous of us not to be too self-absorbed. Other creatures go to the other extreme to an amazing extent. They are ridiculously oblivious to what is going on. The smallest ant in the garden will ignore the largest woman who visits it. She is a huge and most dangerous super-mammoth in relation to him, and her tread shakes the earth; but he has no time to be bothered, investigating such like phenomena. He won't even get out of her way. He has his work to do, hang it!

Birds and squirrels have less of this glorious independence of spirit. They watch you closely—if you move around, but not if you keep still. In other words, they pay no more attention than they can help, even to mammoths.

We, of course, observe everything, or try to. We could spend our lives looking on. Consider our museums, for instance; they are a sign of our breed. It makes us smile to see birds, like the magpie, with a mania for this collecting; but only monkeyish beings could reverence museums as we do, and pile such heterogeneous trifles and quantities in them. Old furniture, egg-shells, watches, bits of stone. . . . And next door—a "menagerie." Though our victory over all other animals is now eons old, we still bring home captives and exhibit them caged in our cities. And when a species dies out—or is crowded (by us) off the planet—we even collect the bones

of the vanquished and show them like trophies.

To go back to our prophet. Curiosity is a valuable trait (I can imagine him saying). It will make the simians learn many things. But the curiosity of a simian is as excessive as the toil of an ant. Each simian will wish to know more than his head can hold, not to speak of what it could ever deal with; and those whose minds are active will wish to know everything going. It would stretch a god's skull to accomplish such an ambition, yet simians won't like to think it's beyond their powers. Even small tradesmen and clerks, no matter how thrifty, will be eager to buy costly encyclopedias, or books of all knowledge. Almost every simian family, even the dullest, will think it is due to itself to keep all knowledge handy.

Their idea of a liberal education will therefore be pretty hodge-podge. If it is heterogeneous enough they will be sure it is "liberal." He who narrows his field of study will be viewed with distrust. Critics will simply say, "It is narrow"—and feel they have pelted him with an unbearable epithet. If more than one man in a hundred should thus dare to concentrate, the ruinous effects of being a mere "specialist" will be sadly discussed. It may make a man exceptionally useful, they will have to admit; but, still, they will feel badly and fear that civilization will suffer.

One of their curious educational ideas—but a natural one—will be shown in the efforts they will make to learn more than one "language." They will set their young to spending a decade or more of their lives in studying duplicate systems—whole systems—of chatter. Those who thus learn several different ways to say the same things will command much respect, and those who learn many will be looked on with awe—by true simians. And persons without this accomplishment will be looked down on a little and will actually feel quite apologetic about it themselves.

Consider how enormously complicated a complete language must be, with its long and arbitrary vocabulary, its intricate system of sounds, the many forms that single words may take, especially if they are verbs, the rules of grammar, the sentence structure, the idioms, slang, and inflections. Heavens! what a genius for tongues these simians have! (You remember what Kipling says in the *Jungle Books*, about how disgusted the quiet animals were with the Bandarlog, because they were eternally chattering, would never keep still. Well, this is the good side of it.) Where another race, after the most frightful discord and pains, might have slowly constructed *one* language before this earth grew cold, this race will create literally hundreds, each complete in itself, and many of them with quaint little systems of writing attached. And the owners of this linguistic gift are so humble about it, they will marvel at bees, for their hives, and at beavers' mere dams.

To return, however, to their fear of being too narrow; in going to the other extreme they will run to incredible lengths. Every civilized simian, every day of his life, in addition to all the older facts he has picked up, will wish to know all the "news" of all the world. If he felt any true concern to know it, this would be rather fine of him—it would imply such a close solidarity on the part of his genus. (Such a close solidarity would seem crushing, to others; but that is another matter.) It won't be true concern, however; it will be merely his blind, inherited instinct. He'll forget what he's read, the very next hour, or moment. Yet there he will faithfully sit, the ridiculous creature, reading of bombs in Spain or floods in Tibet, and especially insisting on all the news he can get of the kind his race loved when they hung by their tails in the forest, news that will stir his most primitive simian feelings—wars, accidents, love-affairs, and family quarrels.

To feed himself with this largely purposeless provender he will pay thousands

of simians to be reporters of such events day and night, and they will report them on such a voluminous scale as to smother or obscure more significant news altogether. Great printed sheets will be read by every one every day; and even the laziest of this lazy race will not think it labor to perform this toil. They won't like to eat in the morning without their "papers," such slaves they will be to this weird greed for knowing. They won't even think it is weird, it is so in their blood.

Their swollen desire for investigating everything about them, including especially other people's affairs, will be quenchless. Few will feel that they really are "fully informed," and all will spend much of their days in this way—and their lives.

"Books," too, will be used to slake this unappeasable thirst. They will actually hold books in deep reverence. Books! Bottled chatter! Things that some other simian has formerly said. They will dress them in costly bindings, keep them under glass, and take an affecting pride in the number they read. Libraries—storehouses of books—will dot their world. The destruction of one will be a crime against civilization. (Meaning, again, a simian civilization.) Well, it is an offense, to be sure—a barbaric offense. But so is defacing forever a beautiful landscape; and they won't even notice that sometimes; they won't shudder, anyway, the way they instinctively do at the loss of a "library."

All this is inevitable and natural, and they cannot help it. There are even ways one can justify excesses like this. If their hunger for books ever seems indiscriminate to them when they themselves stop to examine it, they will have their excuses. They will argue that some bits of knowledge they once had thought futile had later on come in most handy, in unthought-of ways. True enough! For their scientists. But not for their average men; they will simply be like obstinate housekeepers who clog up their homes, preserving odd boxes and

wrappings, and stray lengths of string, to exult if but one is of some trifling use ere they die. It will be in this spirit that simians will cherish their books, and pile them up everywhere into great indiscriminate mounds; and these mounds will seem signs of culture and sagacity to them.

Those who know many facts will feel wise! They will despise those who don't. They will even believe, many of them, that knowledge is power. Unfortunate dupes of this saying will keep on reading, ambitiously, till they have stunned their native initiative and made their thoughts weak, and will then wonder dazedly what in the world is the matter, and why the great power they were expecting to gain fails to appear. Again, if they ever forget what they read, they'll be worried. Those who *can* forget—those who can luckily rid their poor crowded minds of such facts as the month, day, and year that their children were born, or the numbers on houses, or the “names” (the mere meaningless labels) of the people they meet—will be urged to go live in sanitariums or see memory-doctors!

By nature their itch is rather for knowing than for understanding or thinking. Some of them will learn to think, doubtless, and even to concentrate, but their eagerness to acquire those accomplishments will not be strong or insistent. Creatures whose mainspring is curiosity will enjoy the accumulating of facts far more than the pausing at times to reflect on those facts. If they do not reflect on them, of course, they'll be slow to find out about the ideas and relationships lying behind them; and they will be curious about those ideas, so you would think they would reflect. But deep thinking is painful. It means they must channel the spreading rivers of their attention. That cannot be done without discipline and drills for the mind, and they will abhor doing that; their minds will work better when they are left free to run off at tangents.

Compare them in this with other

species. Each has its own kind of strength. To be compelled to be as quick-minded as the simians would be torture to cows. Cows could dwell on one idea, week by week, without trying at all; but they would all have brain-fever in an hour at a simian tea. A super-cow people would revel in long, thoughtful books on abstruse philosophical subjects, and would sit up late reading them. Most of the ambitious simians who try it—out of pride, go to sleep. The typical simian brain is supremely distractable, and it's really too jumpy by nature to endure much reflection.

Therefore, many more of them will be well-informed rather than sagacious

This will result in their knowing most things far too soon, at too early a stage of civilization to use them aright. They will learn to make valuable explosives at a stage in their growth when they will use them not only in industries, but for killing brave men. They will devise ways to mine coal efficiently, in enormous amounts, at a stage when they won't know enough to conserve it, and will waste their few stores. They will use up a lot of it in a simian habit called “travel.” This will consist in queer little hurried runs over the globe, to see ten thousand things in the hope of thus filling their minds. (Even in a wild state the monkey is restless and does not live in lairs.)

Their minds will be full enough. Their intelligence will be active and keen. It will have a constant tendency, however, to outstrip their wisdom. Their intelligence will hurry them into building great industrial systems before they have the sagacity and judgment to run them aright. They will build greater political empires than they know how to guide. They will quarrel endlessly about which is the best scheme of government without stopping to realize that learning to govern comes first. (The average simian will imagine he knows without learning.)

The natural result will be industrial and political wars. In a world of un-

manageable structures such smashes must come.

Inventions will come so easily to them (in comparison with all other creatures), and they will take such childish pleasure in monkeying around, making inventions, that their many devices will be more of a care than a comfort. In their homes a large part of their time will have to be spent keeping their numerous ingenuities in good working-order—their elaborate bell-ringing arrangements, their locks and their clocks. In the field of science, to be sure, this fertility in invention will lead to a long list of important and beautiful discoveries—telescopes and the calculus, radiographs and the spectrum. Discoveries great enough, almost, to make angels of them. But here again their simian-ness will cheat them of half of their dues, for they will neglect great discoveries of the truest importance, and honor extravagantly those of less value and splendor if only they cater especially to simian traits.

To consider examples: A discovery that helps them to talk, just to talk, more and more, will be hailed by these beings as one of the highest of triumphs. Talking to each other over wires will come in this class. The lightning, when harnessed and tamed, will be made to trot round, conveying the most trivial cacklings all day and all night.

Huge seas of talk in all forms, such as print, speech, and writing, will roll unceasingly over their “civilized” realms, involving an unbelievable waste of labor and time, and sapping the intelligence talk is supposed to upbuild. In a simian civilization great halls will be erected for “lectures,” and great throngs will actually pay to go in these at night to hear some self-satisfied talk-maker chatter for hours. Almost any subject will do for a lecture or talk; yet very few subjects will be counted important enough for the average man to do any *thinking* on them, off by himself.

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Are we or are we not simians? It is no use for any man to plan or adopt a system of ethics until he has decided first of all where he stands on that question. It is the same in economics, art, education, philosophy, what not. In every field of thought two great schools appear that are divided on this: Must we forever be, at heart, high-grade simians? Or are we at heart something else?

“Our problem is not to discover what we ought to do if we were different, but what we ought to do, being what we are. There is no end to the beings we can imagine different from ourselves; but they do not exist, and we cannot be sure they would be better than we if they did. For, when we imagine them, we must imagine an entire environment; we must imagine them as part of a whole reality that does not now exist. And that reality, since it is a figment of our minds, would probably be inferior to the reality that is. For there is this to be said in favor of reality—that we have nothing to compare it with. Our fantasies are always incomplete, because they are fantasies. And reality is complete. We cannot compare their incompleteness with its completeness.”¹

Too many moralists begin with a dislike of reality—a dislike of men as they are. They are free to dislike them—but not at the same time to be moralists. Their feeling leads them to ignore the obligation which should rest on all teachers, “to discover the best that man can do, not to set impossibilities before him and tell him that if he does not perform them he is damned.”

Man is moldable, very, and it is desirable that he should aspire. But he is apt to be hasty about accepting any and all general ideals without figuring out whether they are suitable for simian use.

One result of his habit of swallowing whole most of the ideals that occur to him is that he has swallowed a number that strongly conflict. Any ideal what-

¹ From an anonymous article entitled “Tolstoy and Russia,” in *The London Times*, September 26, 1918.

ever strains our digestions if it is hard to assimilate; but when two at once act on us in different ways, it is unbearable. In such a case, the poets will prefer the ideal that's idealist; the hard-headed instinctively choose the one adapted to simians.

As a practical matter, every man needs to decide where he stands on this question, before he attempts to make decisions that are really subsidiary.

For example, take our methods of education. We have, in the main, two great systems. One depends upon discipline, the other on exciting the interest. The teacher who does not recognize or allow for our simian nature keeps little children at work for long periods at dull and dry tasks. Without some such discipline, he fears that his boys will lack strength. The other system believes they will learn more when their interest is aroused; and when their minds, which are mobile by nature, are allowed to keep moving.

Or in politics: the best government for simians seems to be based on a parliament—a talk-room, where endless vague thoughts can be warmly expressed. This is the natural child of those primeval sessions that gave pleasure to apes. It is neither an ideal nor a rational arrangement, of course. Small executive committees would be better. But not if we are simians.

Or in industry: Why do factory-workers produce more in eight hours a day than in ten? It is absurd. Super-sheep could not do it. But that is the way men are made. To preach to such beings about the dignity of labor is futile. The dignity of labor is not a simian conception at all. True simians hate to have to work steadily; they call it grind and confinement. They are always ready to pity the poor, who are condemned to this fate, and to congratulate those who escape it, or who can do something else. When they see some performer in spangles risk his life at a circus, swinging around on trapezes, high up in the air, and when they are told he must do it

daily, do they pity *him*? No! Super-elephants would say, and quite properly, "What a horrible life!" But it seems rather stimulating to simians. Boys envy the fellow. On the other hand, whenever we are told about factory life, we instinctively shudder to think of enduring such evils. We see some old workman filling cans with a whirring machine, and we hear the humanitarians telling us, indignant and grieving, that he actually must stand in that nice, warm, dry room every day, safe from storms and wild beasts, and with nothing to do but fill cans; and at once we groan: "How deadly! What monotonous toil! Shorten his hours!" His work would seem blissful to super-spiders—yet we think it's intolerable. "Grind and confinement?" That's the strong monkey blood in our veins.

Our monkey blood is also apparent in our judgments of crime. If a crime is committed on impulse, we partly forgive it. Why? Because, being simians, with a weakness for yielding to impulses, we like to excuse ourselves by feeling not accountable for them. Elephants would have probably taken an opposite stand. They aren't creatures of impulse, and would be shocked at crimes due to such causes; their fault is the opposite one of pondering too long over injuries, and becoming vindictive in the end, out of all due proportion. If a young super-elephant were to murder another on impulse, they would consider him a dangerous character and string him right up. But if he could prove that he had long thought of doing it, they would tend to forgive him. "Poor fellow! He brooded," they would say. "That's upsetting to any one."

Whatever we are, it is important that we should all do our best. This is evidently a world where the ruling race must be on its mettle. Our hold on the planet is not absolute. Our descendants may lose it.

Germs may do them out of it. A chestnut fungus springs up, defies us,

and kills all our chestnuts. The boll-weevil very nearly baffles us. The fly seems unconquerable. Only a strong civilization, when such foes are about, can preserve us. And our present efforts to cope with such beings are fumbling and slow.

We haven't the habit of candidly facing our precarious status. We don't pay a respectful attention to our biological history. We blandly and blindly assume that we were "intended" to rule, and that no other outcome could even be considered by nature. But the facts are, of course, that this is a hard and precarious world, where every mistake and infirmity must be paid for in full. "It needs but little imagination to see how great are the probabilities that, after all, man will prove but one more of Nature's failures, ignominiously to be swept from her work-table, to make way for another venture."

If mankind ever is swept aside as a failure, however, what a brilliant and enterprising failure he at least will have been! I felt this with a kind of warm suddenness only to-day, as I finished these dreamings and drove through the gates of the park. I had been shutting my modern surroundings out of my thoughts so completely, and living as it were in the wild world of ages ago, that when I let myself come back suddenly to the twentieth century, and stare at the park and the people, the change was tremendous. All around me were the well-dressed descendants of primitive animals, whizzing about in bright mo-

tors, past tall, spacious buildings. What gifted, energetic achievers they suddenly seemed!

I thought of a photograph I had once seen, of a ship being torpedoed. There it was, the huge, finely made structure, awash in the sea, with tiny black spots hanging on to its sides—crew and passengers. The great ship, even while sinking, was so mighty, and those atoms so helpless. Yet, it was those tiny beings that had created that ship. They had planned it and built it and guided its bulk through the waves. They had also invented a torpedo that could rend it asunder.

They tell me that our race may be an accident in a meaningless universe, living its brief life uncared-for, on this dark, cooling star; but even so—and all the more—what marvelous creatures we are! What fairy-story, what tale from the *Arabian Nights* of the jinns, is a hundredth part as wonderful as this true fairy-story of simians? And it is so much more heartening, too, than the tales we invent. A universe capable of giving birth to any such accidents is—blind or not—a good world to live in, even if not the best.

We have won our way up against odds. We have made this our planet. It stirs me to feel myself part of our racial adventure.

It is an adventure that may never be noticed by gods, it may lead to no eternal reward, but it is a reward in itself. God or no god, we belong to a race that has made a long march, and that in the future may travel on greater roads still.

THE SUBLIMATED SAVAGE FIJIAN

BY SYDNEY GREENBIE

IT was Tuesday, yet the next day was Thursday. Where Wednesday went I have never been able to find out. We had arrived at the point in the Pacific where one day always swallows up the other and leaves none. The European world, measuring the earth from its own vantage-point, had allotted no day for the mid-Pacific, so that instead of arriving at Suva, Fiji, in proper sequence of time, we were both a day late and a day ahead of time. For that matter, the whole trip was a puzzle, so rapidly and quietly had passed the seven days from Honolulu.

The few days in the neighborhood of the equator had steeped us all in drooping feebleness. We seemed overweighted with nothingness. I had the steward bring a mattress out on deck; a heavy wind turned the night suddenly so cold that I had to send for a blanket. The howling round the mast and the flapping of the canvas sounded like a tragedy without human personality. The night was pitch black and the blackness was intensified by the intermittent streaks of lightning, but there was no rain, and the ship moved on steadily, scornfully indifferent, fearless, and emotionless.

Eager, full of emotion and expectation, I packed my trunk next day, determined to break my journey to Australia. The passengers wondered how one with no special purpose—that is, without a job—could get off at Fiji. Had they not read in their school geographies of jungles and savages all mixed and wild, with mocking natives grinning at you from behind bamboo-trees, living expectations of a juicy dinner? So unbelievable did it seem to the passengers—

they who always pass without pausing—that one as sane as I appeared to be should leave the world behind him on such an uncertain venture, that when I returned to the ship for dinner that evening they greeted me with, “Oh, you’ve changed your mind about it, have you?” When I assured them I had not they warned me about dengue fever, they extolled the virtues of the Fijian maidens, and exaggerated the vices of the Fijian men. The word “cannibals” howled round my head as the impersonal wind had howled round the masts the night before. I almost began to pity myself for having announced my intentions before taking a hasty survey of the island. But, having committed myself, there was no turning back—and, what was more, I didn’t want to turn back.

That afternoon we had sighted land for the first time in seven days. Alofa Islands, pale blue, smooth-edged, were a living lie to reality. A peculiar feeling comes over one in passing without touching terra firma. It is the longing for the sun after days and days of gray days, the longing for the rain in the desert. It is the longing for the return to the actualities of life after days on the unvariable sea. As we neared the islands of Fiji, the terrestrial details stirred in me all the primitive instincts which have been suppressed in man for thousands upon thousands of years. In spite of all our horror of the primitive, I felt a strange sense of home-coming.

When I got the first real whiff of tropical sweetness, mixed though it was with copra and mold, all other considerations of life vanished. From their cool heights the hills looked down in pity upon the little village of Suva as it lay prostrate