

This Simian World

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With Illustrations by the Author



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Set in Garamond

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“How I hate the man who talks about the ‘brute creation,’ with an ugly emphasis on *brute*... As for me, I am proud of my close kinship with other animals. I take a jealous pride in my Simian ancestry. I like to think that I was once a magnificent hairy fellow living in the trees, and that my frame has come down through geological time via sea jelly and worms and Amphioxus, Fish, Dinosaurs, and Apes. Who would exchange these for the pallid couple in the Garden of Eden?”

W.N.P. Barbellion



I

Last Sunday, Potter took me out driving along upper Broadway, where those long rows of tall new apartment houses were built a few years ago. It was a mild afternoon and great crowds of people were out. Sunday afternoon crowds. They were not going anywhere, — they were just strolling up and down, staring at each other, and talking. There were thousands and thousands of them.

“Awful, aren’t they!” said Potter.

I didn’t know what he meant. When he added, “Why, these crowds,” I turned and asked, “Why, what about them?” I wasn’t sure whether he had an idea or a headache.

“Other creatures don’t do it,” he replied, with a discouraged expression. “Are any other beings ever found in such masses, but vermin? Aimless, staring, vacant-minded, — look at them! I can get no sense whatever of individual worth, or of value in men as a race, when I see them like this. It makes one almost despair of civilization.”

I thought this over for awhile, to get in touch with his attitude. I myself feel differently at different times about us human-beings: sometimes I get pretty indignant when we are attacked (for there is altogether too much

abuse of us by spectator philosophers) and yet at other times I too feel like a spectator, an alien: but even then I had never felt so alien or despairing as Potter. "Let's remember," I said, "it's a simian civilization."

Potter was staring disgustedly at some vaudeville sign-boards.

"Yes," I said, "those for example are distinctively simian. Why should you feel disappointment at something inevitable?" And I went on to argue that it wasn't as though we were descended from eagles for instance, instead of (broadly speaking) from ape-like or monkeyish beings. Being of simian stock, we had simian traits. Our development naturally bore the marks of our origin. If we had inherited our dispositions from eagles we should have loathed vaudeville. But as cousins of Bandarlog, we loved it. What could you expect?

