

The Strength of a Gorilla

Zoology

GEORGE JENNISON, in *Noah's Cargo* (Macmillan):

Du Chaillu's *Adventures in Equatorial Africa*, 1861, is still the best account of the gorilla. Doubts have been expressed of his veracity, but points that can be checked have proved him correct. Its mode of fighting has been particularly criticized. In its habits the gorilla is very like a chimpanzee, and their manner of fighting is known; the writer once umpired a match between Consul and an Anubis baboon, in which the ape only used its open hand and the other bit. Similarly, when attacking a keeper, chimpanzees first poke with the open hand and retreat, only clasping and biting when this has been twice or thrice repeated. We may take it the gorilla does the same. He has no respect for Queensbury rules, and no man would stand up for the second round.

"Having eviscerated the hunter," Du Chaillu says, "it dented and bent his gun." Why not? It was only a common trade musket. The writer has seen a lion crumple up a bucket like tissue paper; the gorilla's teeth are bigger, his arms far stronger. The fingers of these beasts seem insensible to pain; Jacob, the London orang, in his playful moods, twisted out the strong wire of his cage and escaped more than once. Jacob did not weigh more than 250 pounds, if that. Du Chaillu, who never exaggerates the size of his gorillas, said the one in question stood 5 feet 7 inches high. Here are the measurements of a gorilla shot by Herr Paschen, in Yaunds, Cameroon, on April 15, 1900, and mounted in Lord Rothschild's museum at Tring: Height, 5 feet 6 inches; weight, 540 pounds; arm stretch, 9 feet 1 inch—and this one mass of muscle.

Who can estimate his strength? No one can, and the latest writers are wilder than Du Chaillu. Their gorilla, the latest found near Lake Kivu, in Uganda, right up to the snow-line, twists the gun into a corkscrew. That beast was small in comparison. Height, 5 feet 4¾ inches; arm stretch, 7 feet 6 inches; chest, 5 feet 1 inch.

If there be exaggeration, it may be found here: "These animals attain prodigious proportions, being at times as much as 80 inches round

the chest and 16 round the forearm, and their height reaches 7 or 8 feet" ("Captain Phillipps' Journey across Africa," *The Observer*, December 24, 1922).

The negroes kill the gorilla for meat. Fearing the ridicule of their enemies, they never keep the young they take alive. Naturalists have the greatest difficulty in getting a "boy" to attend to monkeys. But the natives have no objection to selling them to traders. Bosman prints the perennial joke: "There are negroes who affirm that these monkeys can speak, but that they will not, in order not to work." He also says: "The best thing about these monkeys is that they can be taught everything their master desires." The clever orangs and chimpanzees always owe much of their education to the traders in their native land. The chimpanzee is more nimble than the orang both in mind and movement, yet little superior in intelligence. The gorilla has a bigger brain than either, but it is sulky and morose by nature and requires great love and affection. This fact is now recognized, and several young gorillas have proved as clever and tractable as chimpanzees. John Daniel, the first of these wonders the writer saw in a hat shop in London, was as playful as a kitten; it romped among the latest creations without touching one. Its lady trainer told of many traits of wisdom—the strangest must suffice. The little fellow loved to sit in her lap, and was on the point of doing so one day when she was dressed for a visit. A lady friend said: "Don't let him spoil your dress," and John Daniel was warned off accordingly. He retired, to return in a moment with a newspaper, which he opened on her knees, and then took his accustomed seat! The animal was sold to a big circus in America. When his friend, Mr. E. H. Bostock, told the news, the writer asked him if they had bought the lady too, and received the answer "No." "Then," he said, "John Daniel will be dead in a month." Mr. Bostock agreed—as a fact we allowed two weeks too long. Friendship is more vital to gorillas than to chimpanzees, yet the whole secret of the wonderful attainments of the two Consuls—we thought the first the cleverer—lay in their being family

pets. Since Consul II learned to ride a bicycle in 1895, the world has swarmed with trained chimpanzees. It would be tedious to recount their tricks, more interesting to adduce instances of innate intelligence, which, wonderful in themselves, are likely to be surpassed in the future when more specimens live the eight or twelve years, which, in the opinion of Dr. Chalmers Mitchell, marks the limit of their mental growth. Counting was the first claimed proof of monkey development on rational lines—to the writer it seemed very much a case of self-deception; years ago he saw the famous Sally handing straws to her keeper, often the number he named, but it proved nothing; as the subject interested him greatly, he tried many chimpanzees, with little real success; they were more successful in associating the shapes of letters with food—B for banana, for example, than in understanding the meaning of one or two, but the imaginary successes were astounding. One evening the keeper repeatedly asked his charge for straws up to 15, and always got the correct number. "Now," said the writer, "do not move." He remained perfectly still, and the mystified monkey presented big numbers, little numbers, any number to try to please him. The man had deceived himself by an involuntary shadow of a move which the chimpanzee had obeyed every time. But there are definite evidences of mind: shapes are understood, keys are quickly selected from a bunch, inserted in the keyhole, and turned. A chimpanzee at Belle Vue alone, went further and made the key, fitted it to the lock, and opened the cage door. It was only a square box key made by biting a bit of wooden hoop to shape, but it implied reasoning, observation and deduction. The animal was Consul II; Consul I had been found loose in the gardens twice; the authorities imagined that he had made a key or two, and, on the basis of safety first, Consul II was never allowed to handle keys, and therefore must have observed the key in the keeper's hand, seen the result, and made the numerous necessary deductions. Nuts and bolts, whether visible or invisible, are child's play to chimpanzees.

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