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The monkey folk of South Africa

Frederik William Fitzsimons

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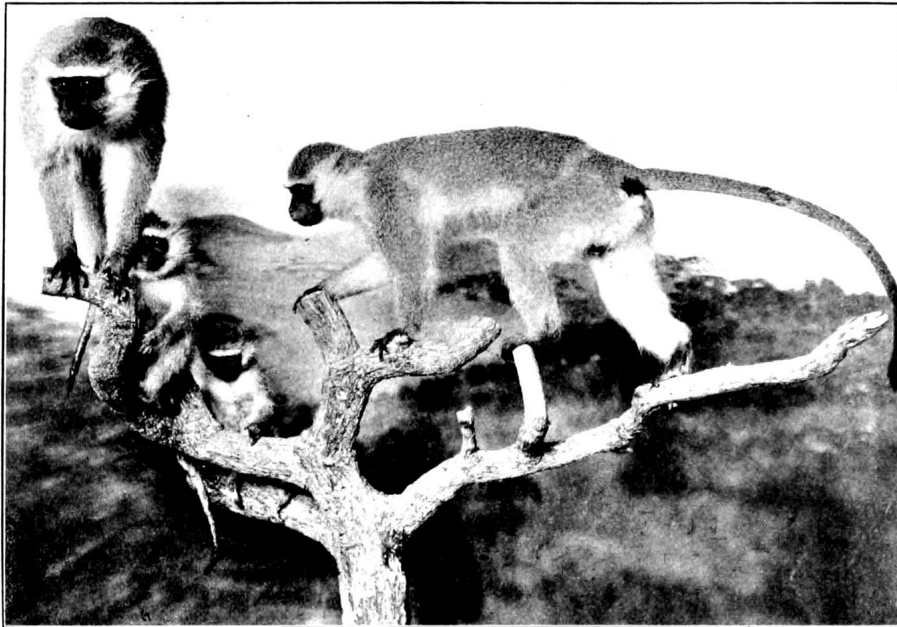
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Vervet Monkeys (*Cercopithecus pygerythrus*). Male, female, and twins. When the female was captured, she had two babies about a month old, which clung tightly to her breast.

THE MONKEYFOLK OF SOUTH AFRICA

BY

F. W. FITZSIMONS, F.Z.S., ETC.
DIRECTOR, PORT ELIZABETH MUSEUM

AUTHOR OF

"MAMMALS OF SOUTH AFRICA," "BIRDS OF SOUTH AFRICA,"
AND "THE SNAKES OF SOUTH AFRICA: THEIR VENOM
AND THE TREATMENT OF SNAKE BITE," ETC.

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P R E F A C E

THIS volume is written mostly in the form of anecdotes. The animals are made to tell their own stories.

By adopting this style I hope to interest the minds of our boys and girls, and at the same time to present all that is known to science about the ways and habits of the monkeys of South Africa.

I have been encouraged to do this by the large measure of success which attended such efforts in the past, in connection with the literary and lecturing departments of my work as a museum director. In the degree that a writer is able to interest the mind of the reader, so just in that degree will he succeed in impressing the cells of the grey matter of the brain. Unless the teacher succeed in arousing the intelligent interest of his pupil, he can make but little headway.

I am a strong advocate of books being written in simple language, because they are then easily comprehended by learned men and women, as well as the most ignorant school-boy or girl.

The reason, probably, why scientific knowledge is so distasteful to the general public is that it is usually pre-

sented, either verbally or in books, in a form so complex and involved that it is not readily understood, and therefore fails to interest the public mind. I think that if our boys and girls can be taught to take a real live interest in the Creator's handiwork, they will grow up truly and genuinely reverent.

Nearly, if not all the ideas which have led to discoveries have been gained by the observation and study of the marvellous works of God upon the world and in the heavens.

In the degree that we profited by such study, so in that degree have we risen superior to the adverse forces which threatened to overwhelm us.

This world is a great book—the Book of Nature. In its bosom is stored up the history of the past. Upon its surface are the results of that wonderful law through which God perfects His works. We term it the law of Evolution.

It is necessary for the moral, spiritual, and physical health that the individual should take up the intelligent study of some mind-developing subject, apart from the ordinary routine of life. The man or woman who is wholly absorbed in his or her trade or profession becomes, in time, incapable of taking an intelligent interest in anything else. Such people become mentally dwarfed. The human brain is very complex, and unless the various parts are systematically exercised, they become more or less atrophied, as do those muscles which are rarely, if ever, used.

My excuse for writing the book is that I am keenly

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interested in the natural history of South Africa, having devoted all my life, so far, to it. I shall feel well repaid if I am able to stimulate the minds of some of our boys and girls to take an intelligent interest in the creatures of mountain, veld, forest, and stream.

THE AUTHOR.

PORT ELIZABETH MUSEUM,
PORT ELIZABETH, SOUTH AFRICA.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THIS new edition has been carefully revised throughout, and in some cases newer and better illustrations have been substituted.

THE AUTHOR.

July 1924.

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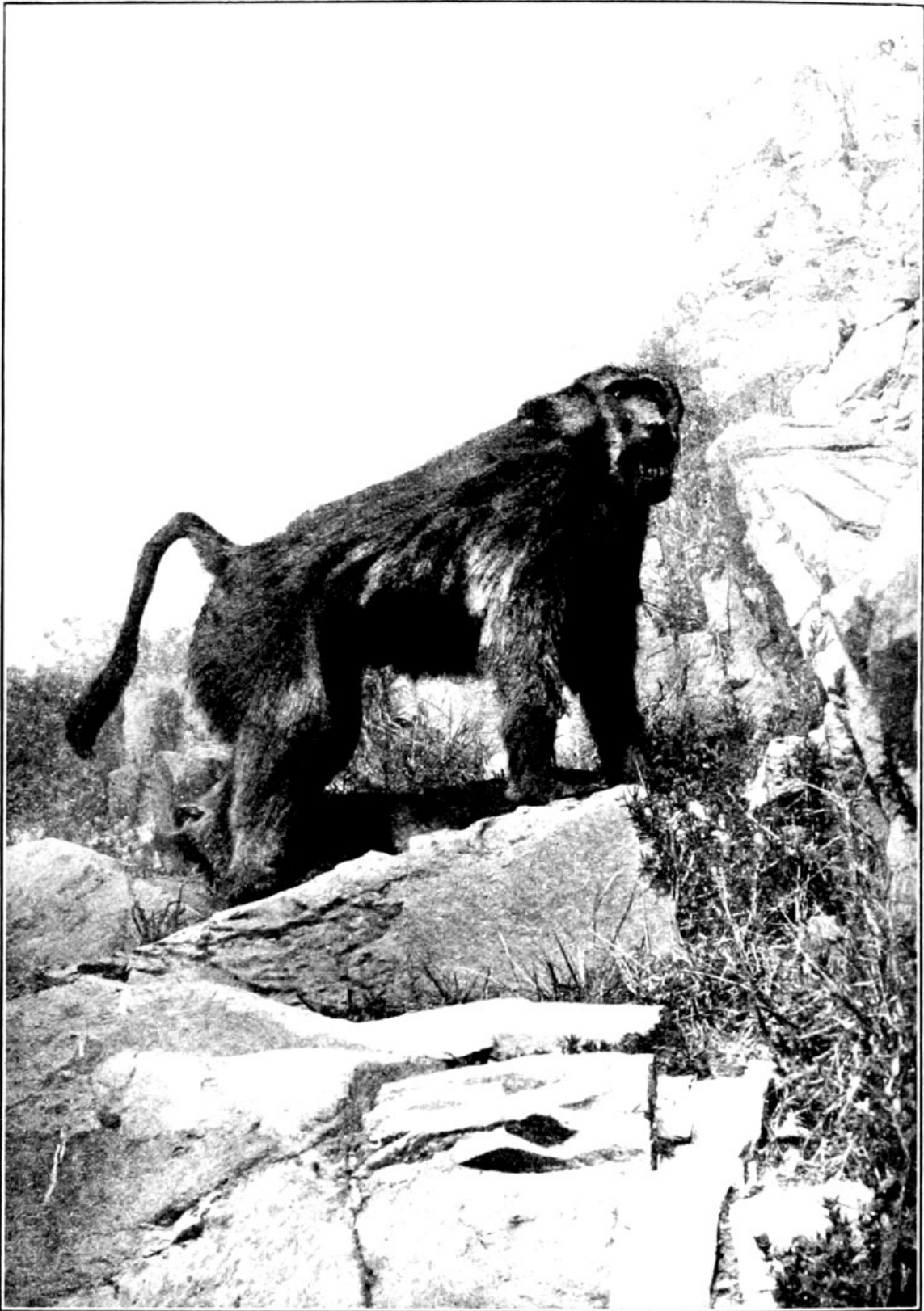
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A sentinel Chacma Baboon high up on a kranz in the act of warning the troops, who are digging up roots and bulbs upon the veld below.

upon us. He sent a crafty old Hottentot out scouting, and that old sinner, who was as intelligent as even our leaders, traced us to our homes in a bush-covered krantz, where there were a number of small caves and other rock shelters. These shelters were so well hidden with bush, and the surroundings so rocky and overgrown with scrub, that we had fondly thought our retreat would never be found. We always took great precautions when approaching it. We never went straight home. We pretended to go in a different direction, and would disappear amongst the foliage, and then turn several times, travelling some distance in one direction, then swerving off at an angle. That old Hottentot had inherited such a lot of his monkey ancestors' nature-craft that he wasn't to be deceived.

OUR HOME ATTACKED

One morning we came forth as usual after a sound sleep, and clambered higher up the rocks where the sun shone when it rose over the distant hills. We always sat up there, basking in the sun until the dew had vanished from the leaves and grass, when we would troop off and get breakfast. We are not so fortunate as you humanfolk, who simply get out of bed and walk into another room where there is everything you require already prepared for you. We baboonfolk have got to find our breakfast every morning. Sometimes we have to go many miles for it, and work hard, digging in the sun-baked ground, or climbing trees and picking off tiny berries one by one. We grown-up folk were gossiping together, and the children were romping and playing tricks upon each other, when the sentry's cry of alarm rang out. Instantly we started up and glanced at our leader, whom we always followed. Before we could move, the cracks of many rifles rang out and re-echoed amongst the kloofs. Five of our folk fell mortally wounded.

Three pitched headlong from the rocks, their bodies bounding from the jagged edges of the face of the cliff. Instantly we scattered, and retreated in the direction taken by our chief. The rifles spat fire again and again, and many more of our folk were killed or wounded. At last we reached a portion of the krantz which was very high and bush-clad. In this there was a secret hiding-place, where it was impossible for humanfolk to reach us or to locate us. Many volleys were poured into the bush where we were seen to disappear, with the object, evidently, of dislodging us. We all crowded closely into the rock shelter, and lay still. Three or four random bullets reached us, killing one of our children, and wounding three others. One of the bullets passed right through a little boy's head and buried itself in my shoulder. The blood gushed out of the wound. I held my fingers tightly over the hole to stop the blood. Many more of our number were suffering from wounds, most of whom were also holding their fingers or the palms of their open hands over the wounds.

When the humanfolk had gone off, we cautiously crept out of the small cave and gathered the leaves of a medicinal plant, which we rolled up into pellets and stuffed into the bullet-holes in our limbs or bodies. I suppose you think we baboonfolk haven't got enough intelligence to do such things, but I assure you we have. It would astonish you to hear of the many things we know, which you imagine only humanfolk can do.

OUR NEW HOME

Our wise men, or at least those of them who were still alive, sat in solemn council during the afternoon, and eventually decided to lie low for a day or two, and then to retreat silently to another part of the country. Two scouts were meantime sent out to explore the country and report.



A Baboonfolk youth and youngster in their native home on a South African krantz, which some people call a precipice.

You see, before leaving a home such as ours, it is always necessary to know just where we intend to go, and whether our proposed new home is suitable. The scouts returned after an absence of a day and a half, and reported that many miles distant there was a great gorge, with a small bush-surrounded spruit running through it. They said that there was a thick belt of bush near by, as well as miles of bushveld, and scattered clumps of prickly pears.

Helping along our wounded comrades, and carrying the small children and other little ones who were wounded, we crept forth, and keeping under cover as much as possible, we followed the scouts, one of whom kept well in advance, so as to warn us if danger threatened.

We reached our new home in safety, weary, heartsore, and unhappy. Creeping into the thickest clumps of bushes, those of us who were most exhausted lay down and rested. Those who were not wounded volunteered to go forth and explore the cliffs. Our chief picked out six, and instructed them to search the whole locality for the best spot for our home. He rallied the other strong men round him, and instructing them to keep a keen watch below, clambered up to the top of the highest tree, and did sentry duty himself.

After three or four hours the scouts returned. Two of them reported that, higher up the gorge, there was an ideal spot for a home. They explained that at the foot of the krantz the hill sloped steeply, and it was covered with dense thorny bush. The krantz itself was partly covered with stunted bush. They had discovered a great crack which ran horizontally along the face of the krantz, in which there was ample shelter for a clan ten times our number. Here and there thick patches of bush grew out of the rents in the rock, behind which we should be able to find cosy shelters, in which to sleep or to hide from our enemies. There were in addition three or four lines of retreat in case we were

attacked, and the krantz was so situated that we couldn't be surrounded.

Scattering through the bush, those of us who were able gathered food, for we were dreadfully hungry. Storing all we could in our cheek pouches, and carrying what we could in our hands, we returned and fed our wounded comrades.

A GOOD AND USEFUL FRIEND

I am a slave to a hunter-man. He captured me when I was a boy, and I have lived with him ever since. I am now nine years of age. My master thinks I am worth my weight in gold. I have heard him telling his friends ever so many times that I have not only saved his life many times over, but also that of his men, and his oxen, horses, and dogs. He says he wouldn't dream of penetrating some of the places where he has gone at times without me.

First he trained me to be a voorlooper, which means a leader of oxen. I rather like this work, because as I lead the oxen along, I can pick up and eat the beetles which crawl about the roads.

Then my master trained me to find water for him. When I understood what was required of me, I went about the business willingly, because I love my master, for he is so kind and gentle with me. You see you humanfolk can't talk our language, so it takes a good while for us to understand each other, especially when you want to teach us about something we have never done in that way before.

South Africa isn't like England. In the latter country the people growl and grumble all the time about having too much rain. In South Africa, almost wherever you go, the humanfolk, the baboonfolk, and the other creatures complain that they don't get half enough. Often in the Karoo for a whole year, and even two or three years, hardly

more than two or three showers fall. Many parts of the country are parched and dry. Sometimes there will be heavy rains, and the vleys, the ponds, and the rivers are filled, and the springs gush out afresh. Then the hot sun's rays pour down day after day and month after month, greedily sucking up the water again into the skies, and all the land once again is thirsty.

You humanfolk imagine the plants are senseless sorts of things. Don't you believe it. They are nothing of the sort. They can adapt themselves to altered conditions of life, just as well, or better, than you can. Now if a few of you humanfolk were lost out in the wilds, and were without guns to kill the wild creatures, you would die of starvation, although there would be plenty of food everywhere.

When the climate began to alter, instead of regular rains to give the plants all the water they needed, there were long periods of drought between times. Those dry times gradually grew longer, and there was less and less rain. Did the hundreds of kinds or species of plants wither and die because their outward circumstances, or rather means of livelihood, had been taken away? No, they didn't do anything of the sort. They just adapted themselves to the altered conditions. They surrounded their tender internal parts with tough skins, which prevented the dry air and hot sun from sucking out their water supply. Then their bodies grew fatter, and they threw out fewer leaves. In these fat bodies they stored up a huge amount of water, and kept it for future use, just like you do when you store it in tanks. You see, when a shower of rain fell, the roots of the plants greedily sucked up as much water as they could hold, and stored it away. It was doled out as required for the life of the plant.

A CRAFTY DODGE

Then other plants adopted a different plan. Instead of growing up into the air to allow the sun and the dry scorching atmosphere to suck out their water, their roots slowly swelled and swelled, until they looked like fat stumpy bottles. These roots you call bulbs. Of course all plants must breathe and absorb some sunshine, just like all of us more intelligent creatures, such as you and I; so these crafty plants spread out their leaves flat over the ground and pressed them tight down to the earth. They had two reasons for doing this. One was because they wanted to expose as little of their surfaces to the dry parched air as possible. The other was to prevent themselves, or rather their heads, being eaten off by wild animals. So, don't you ever again say that plants haven't got any sense.

What I have told you about them are just a few of the wonderful things they do.

STORED-UP WATER

Now we baboonfolk can live in the driest parts of South Africa, because we know how to get water when there is a drought on, and the vleys and springs are all dry. We dig up the plant-bulbs, which are really natural reservoirs of water. The bulb provides us with nourishment, and the water it contains is all that we require in the absence of a proper water supply. Now these plants are up to all kinds of dodges. You see, they learn from experience, just as you and I do. They struggle fiercely for existence, just as much as we do, for life is also dear to them. They know that victory lies with the fittest, so they have schemed and planned to outwit their enemies. Some of them grow sharp spikes all over their bodies, which stick out in all

directions. Others manufacture a poisonous juice, which they store up in cells within their bodies so that their enemies, who have not grown wise from experience, get poisoned when they eat those plants and die. We baboonfolk know, by long experience, which plants are poisonous and which are not. The crafty Bosjesmannen learned all this nature-craft from us. When they came down into South Africa, and began to vex us, many of them were poisoned. They carefully watched us and ate the same kinds of plants, berries, and other thing which we ate, and the only reward we got from them was, they shot and ate us whenever they got the chance. They chased us from our cave dwellings, our favourite hunting-grounds, and took possession of our springs and bees' nests, forcing us away into the bleakest and most barren wildernesses, where we live even now, for you white humanfolk are more to be feared by us than the ancient pigmy Bosjesmannen.

HOW I HELP MY MASTER

Now, my master in his wanderings often runs quite out of food; so I go along with him and show him where to find the nicest and most wholesome bulbs, fruits, and berries. Often he and I have lived for many days at a time on nothing else. At other times my master would be able to provide plenty of meat by shooting animals with his gun. But when he and his men had lived for a week or two on nothing but flesh food, they began to get ill, and got a terrible craving for vegetable food. Then we would scour the country, and I would help my master to dig up the onion-like plants, and collect the tender shoots of various shrubs, which he put into a pot with some water and meat and made a delicious stew of which I was passionately fond. My master and I were real and true chums. I always sat opposite him when he ate his meals, and he allowed

me to eat as much as I pleased. At night, I slept at his feet and kept them warm.

We baboonfolk sleep very lightly, and the slightest noise wakes us, especially if it be a strange sound. One night a leopard stole silently under the wagon where my master and I lay. I seemed to sense danger, for I awoke and carefully raised my head. There, a few feet away was a long, dark body, in the head of which two phosphorescent-looking eyes gleamed. I knew it was a leopard. He was just about to seize my master by the throat, when with a spring I was on my feet, and with all the power of my lungs I barked several times in rapid succession. Instantly swerving, the leopard bounded away in the darkness as our two big mastiffs rushed up to the rescue.

HUNTING FOR WATER

My master taught me to find water for him. The way he took to make me understand what he wanted me to do seemed cruel at first, and I felt very miserable to think that the master I loved so dearly could be so hard-hearted. I reflected, and turned the matter over in my mind as I lay one night watching the bright stars, which we are told are all great blazing suns as big and bigger than the sun which gives us heat and warmth. Then I saw the matter in quite a different light. It was clear to me that unless water had been found that the whole lot of us, that is, my master, myself, the Kafirs, the dogs, and the oxen, would have all died in a madness of thirst.

The method my master employed was this. He refused to give me water for a whole day, and at the same time fed me on very salty food. I was nearly mad with thirst, but I wasn't angry with my master. I only thought there had been some mistake, for he kept as far away as possible. In fact he was away searching about in the bush-veld near by,