

A Report to an Academy

ESTEEMED GENTLEMEN of the academy!

You have done me the honour of asking me to present a report to the academy concerning my past life as an ape.

I regret to say that I find myself unable to comply with your request as thus formulated. Almost five years now separate me from apehood, a short period, perhaps, as reckoned by the calendar, but an eternity to have to gallop through as I have done, accompanied along stretches of the course by excellent people, advice, applause and orchestral music, and yet essentially alone, since all such company remained—to pursue the metaphor—well on the far side of the rails. This achievement would have been impossible had I sought to cling wilfully to my origins, to the memories of my youth. It was precisely the renunciation of all self-will that I had laid upon myself as my first commandment; I, a free ape, submitted myself to this yoke. But as a result these memories, for their part, closed themselves off from me more and more. If initially a way of return lay open for me—had men so wished—through the whole great archway of the heavens that span the earth, this grew ever lower and narrower behind me as I was driven forward through the successive stages of my development; I felt ever more comfortable and secluded in the world of men; the storm sweeping after me from my past abated; today it is no more than a draught that cools my heels; and the distant hole through which it comes, and through which I once came, has become so small, that even if I had the strength and the will to run back so far, I should have to scrape the hide from my body to get through it. To speak plainly, much as I like using images for these things; to speak plainly: your own apehood, gentlemen, in so far as you have something of the sort behind you, cannot be further removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone who walks this earth feels a tickling at his heel: from the little chimpanzee to the great Achilles.

In the narrowest sense, however, I can perhaps make some reply to

your inquiry after all, and indeed it gives me great pleasure to do so. The first thing I learnt was: how to shake hands; a handshake betokens frankness; allow me therefore today, as I stand at the summit of my career, to supplement that first frank handshake with the frankness of my present words. What I have to tell the academy will not amount to anything essentially new, and it will fall far short of what has been asked of me and what with the best will in the world I am unable to communicate—all the same, it should at least indicate the guideline that an erstwhile ape has followed, as he penetrated into the human world and established himself there. Yet I should certainly have no right to say even the little that follows unless I were entirely sure of myself, and if I had not achieved a position that is by now unassailable on all the great variety stages of the civilized world:

I come from the Gold Coast. For the account of my capture I have to depend on the reports of others. A hunting expedition from the firm of Hagenbeck—with whose leader, by the way, I have since consumed many a bottle of good red wine—was lying in wait in the scrub by the river bank when I came down to drink one evening, in the midst of a company. They fired at us; I was the only one that was hit; they got me twice.

Once in the cheek; that was a slight wound; but it left a large, bald, red scar, which earned me the repulsive and utterly inappropriate name of Red Peter—a positively apish invention, as if to suggest that the only thing distinguishing me from that performing ape Peter, a creature with some small reputation who met his end the other day, was this red mark on my cheek. But that is by the way.

The second shot got me below the hip; that was a bad wound; it is responsible for the fact that I still limp a little to this day. Recently I read an article, written by one of those ten thousand wind-bags who expatiate about me in the press, claiming that my ape nature was not yet wholly suppressed; the proof being that when visitors come to see me I am particularly inclined to take off my trousers so as to show them the spot where the bullet entered. That fellow ought to have each single finger of his scribbling hand shot away, one by one. I am permitted, I presume, to remove my trousers before anyone I please; nothing will be found there save a well-groomed coat of fur and the scar made—let us choose for this particular purpose a particular word, which should not however be misunderstood—the scar made by a heinous shot. Everything is open and above board; there is nothing to

conceal; where the truth is at stake, every high-minded person will cast the refinements of behaviour aside. On the other hand if the writer of that article were to take off his trousers when visitors come, things would certainly appear in a different light, and I will let it stand to his credit that he does not. But in that case let him spare me in return with his delicacy!

After those shots I awoke—and this is where my own memories gradually begin—in a cage between decks aboard the Hagenbeck company steamer. It was no ordinary barred cage with four sides; instead it had three sides fastened to a crate; so the crate made the fourth side of the cage. The whole thing was too low to stand up in and too narrow to sit down. So I had to squat, with bent and constantly trembling knees, and furthermore—since at first I probably wished to see nobody, but just stay in the dark all the time—with my face turned towards the crate, while the bars of the cage cut into my flesh behind. Such a method of confining wild beasts is considered advantageous during the initial period, and today, after my own experience, I cannot deny that from the human point of view this is indeed the case.

But I did not think about that at the time. I had, for the first time in my life, no way out; certainly there was none straight ahead; straight ahead was the crate, plank fixed firmly to plank. Admittedly there was one gap running between them, which I greeted, when I first discovered it, with a howl of foolish rapture; but this gap was nowhere near big enough even to stick one's tail through, and no amount of an ape's strength could widen it.

Apparently, so I was told later, I made exceptionally little noise, from which they concluded that I was either on the point of extinction or that I would, supposing I managed to survive the first critical period, prove most amenable to training. I survived that period. Muffled sobbing, painful flea-hunting, weary licking of a coconut, beating my skull against the side of the crate, sticking out my tongue at anyone who came near—such were the first occupations of my new existence. But in all this just the one, single feeling: no way out. Of course what I then felt, in ape fashion, I can now only represent in human terms, and misrepresent it therefore; but even if I can no longer reach back to the old ape-truth, this does at least lie in the direction I have indicated, of that there is no doubt.

Up to now I had always had so many ways out, and now I had none. I was stuck fast. I would have had no less freedom of movement

if they had nailed me down. And why was this so? Scratch yourself raw between the toes and you won't find the reason. Shove yourself back against the bar until it nearly cuts you in two and you won't find the reason. I had no way out; but I had to make one for myself, for I could not live without it. Always up against this crate—that would inevitably have been the end of me. But up against the crate is where apes belong with Hagenbeck—very well, then, I would cease to be an ape. A clear, a beautiful line of thought, one which I must have somehow hatched out in my belly, for that is the way apes think.

I fear that it may not be understood precisely what I mean by a way out. I use the term in its most ordinary and its fullest sense. I deliberately do not say freedom. I do not mean that grandiose feeling of freedom in all directions. Perhaps I may have known that as an ape, and I have come across men who yearn for it. But for my part it was not freedom that I sought, either then or now. Let me say in passing: freedom is all too often self-deception among men. And if freedom counts as one of the most sublime of feelings, equally sublime is the deception that corresponds to it. Many a time in variety theatres, waiting for my turn to come on, have I watched some pair of acrobats high up in the roof, performing on their trapezes. They swung, they rocked, they leapt, they floated into each other's arms, one carried the other in his teeth by the hair. 'This, too, is human freedom,' I thought, 'arbitrary movement.' What a mockery of mother nature! No building could withstand the laughter of the assembled apes at a sight like that.

No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; to right, to left, no matter where; I made no other demand; even if the way out should prove deceptive as well; the demand was small, the deception could be no greater. Onwards, onwards! Anything but stay still, with arms upraised, crushed against the side of a crate.

Today I can see it all clearly: without the profoundest inward calm I should never have got away. And indeed, perhaps I owe all that I have become to the calm that came over me after the first few days aboard ship. And for that calm, I might also well say, I had the members of the crew to thank.

They are a decent lot of people, when all is said and done. I can still recall with pleasure the sound of their heavy footsteps which used to echo through my head when I was half asleep. It was their habit to set about everything they did immensely slowly. If one of them wanted to rub his eyes, he would lift his hand like a dead weight. Their jokes

were coarse but hearty. Their laughter always had a gruffness in it that sounded dangerous but meant nothing. They always complained that my fleas jumped over on to them; yet they were never seriously angry with me on that account; they knew, after all, that fleas flourish in my fur and that fleas are jumpers; so they came to terms with it. Sometimes when they were off duty a few would sit down in a semi-circle round me; hardly speaking, but making cooing grunts to one another; smoking their pipes, stretched out against the crates; slapping their knees as soon as I made the slightest movement; and now and then one of them would take a stick and tickle me where I liked being tickled. If I were invited today to make a voyage on that ship, I should certainly decline the invitation; but it is equally certain that not all the memories I might muse on between decks would be repellent ones.

Above all, the calmness that I acquired from the company of these folk prevented me from making any attempt to escape. When I now look back, it seems to me that I must have already had some inkling that I had to find a way out if I wanted to survive, but also that the way out was not to run away. I cannot tell any more whether flight was in fact possible, though I believe it was; flight should always be possible for an ape. With my teeth in their present state I have to be careful just cracking an ordinary nut, but then I should probably have managed in time to bite my way through the padlock on the door. I did not do it. What good would it have done me? As soon as I had poked my head out I would have been recaptured, and locked away in some even worse cage; or I might have slipped unnoticed among some other animals, perhaps the boa constrictors opposite, and breathed my last in their arms; or I might even have succeeded in creeping up on deck and jumping overboard, in which case I would have been rocked for a little on the deep and then drowned. Desperate remedies. I did not work things out in such a human way, but under the influence of my surroundings I behaved as if I had.

I did not work things out; but I did observe everything with complete calm. I watched these men walking up and down, always the same faces, the same movements, often it seemed to me they were one and the same man. So this man or these men were moving about unmolested. A lofty goal began to dawn upon me. No one made me any promise that if I became like them the bars of my cage would be lifted. Such promises, for things that seem incapable of fulfilment, are not

given. But make good the fulfilments and the promises will duly appear afterwards, just where you had earlier looked for them in vain. Now there was nothing about these men in themselves that particularly attracted me. Had I been a devotee of that freedom just mentioned, I would surely have preferred the ocean to the way out that I saw reflected in these men's dreary gaze. But anyhow I had been observing them for a long time before such things occurred to me, indeed it was only the accumulated weight of my observations that pushed me in the right direction.

It was so easy to imitate these people. I could spit after only a few days. Then we used to spit in one another's faces; the only difference was that I licked my face clean afterwards, they did not. I could soon smoke a pipe like an old hand; and if I also pressed my thumb down the bowl of the pipe, a roar of approval went up from the whole crew; only the difference between an empty pipe and a full one was something that took me a long time to understand.

What gave me the most trouble was the gin-bottle. The smell was a torture to me; I forced myself as best I could; but it took weeks for me to conquer my aversion. Strangely enough, the men took these inner struggles of mine more seriously than anything else. I cannot differentiate between these people even when I recollect, but there was one of them who came again and again, alone or with friends, by day, by night, at all kinds of hours; he would set himself down in front of me with the bottle and give me instruction. He could not make sense of me, he wanted to solve the riddle of my being. He would slowly uncork the bottle and then look at me to see whether I had understood him; I confess, I was always watching him with the wildest, the most precipitate attention; no such human pupil could any teacher hope to find on the whole surface of the earth; after the bottle was uncorked he would lift it to his mouth; I following him with my eyes right into his gullet; he nods, pleased with me, and puts the bottle to his lips; I, in an ecstasy of dawning enlightenment, scratch myself, amid squeals, here, there and everywhere at random; he is delighted, tips the bottle and takes a swig; I, impatient and desperate to emulate him, befoul myself in my cage, which again gives him great satisfaction; whereupon he, holding out the bottle at arm's length in front of him and returning it with a flourish to his lips, leans back with exaggerated pedantry and empties it at a single draught. I then, worn out by my ex-

cessive ambition, can follow him no longer and cling limply to the bars, while he completes the theoretical part of the lesson by stroking his belly and grinning.

And only now does the practical exercise begin. Am I not already all too exhausted by the theory? Indeed I am, all too exhausted. That is a part of my destiny. All the same I reach, as best I can, for the bottle that is held out for me; uncork it, trembling; with this success I feel my strength gradually returning; I lift the bottle, which by now I can hardly distinguish from the original; put it to my lips and—and fling it down with loathing, with loathing, although it is empty and contains nothing but the smell, fling it down with loathing to the floor. To the sorrow of my teacher, to the even greater sorrow of myself; nor do I succeed in placating either of us by the fact that I do not forget, even after throwing the bottle away, to stroke my belly in the most exemplary fashion and produce the accompanying grin.

All too frequently the lesson took this course. And to the credit of my teacher: he was not angry with me; sometimes, indeed, he may have held his burning pipe against my fur, until it began to smoulder in some place that I found hard to reach, but then he always extinguished it again himself with his massive, gentle hand; he was not angry with me, he recognized that we were both fighting on the same side against the nature of apes and that I had the harder task.

What a triumph it was then, both for him and for me, when one evening before a large audience—perhaps it was some kind of party, a gramophone was playing, an officer was strolling about among the crew—when on this evening, just when no one happened to be looking, I seized a gin-bottle that had been left inadvertently in front of my cage, uncorked it in the approved manner, with the attention of the assembled company gradually mounting, put it to my lips, and without hesitation, without grimacing, like a professional drinker, with eyes rolling and throat gurgling, really and truly drank it dry; then threw the bottle from me, not in despair this time but with artistic skill; forgot, indeed, to stroke my belly; but instead, because I could not help myself, because I felt compelled, because all my senses were reeling, cried out a short, sharp 'Hallo!,' broke into human speech, sprang with this cry into the community of men, and felt their echoing cry: 'Listen, he's speaking!' like a caress over the whole of my sweat-trenched body.

I repeat: I felt no desire to imitate men; I imitated them because I

was seeking a way out, and for no other reason. Nor did that first triumph take me far. My speaking voice failed again at once; it did not come back for months; my aversion to the gin-bottle returned even more strongly than before. But all the same, my course was now set for me, once and for all.

When I was handed over to my first trainer, in Hamburg, I soon grasped the two possibilities that were open to me: the Zoological Gardens or the variety stage. I did not hesitate. I told myself: do all in your power to get into variety; there lies the way out; the zoo is only another barred cage; if you land there you are lost.

And I began to learn, gentlemen. Oh yes, one learns when one has to; one learns if one wants a way out; one learns relentlessly. One watches over oneself with a whip; one flays oneself at the slightest sign of resistance. My ape nature went racing out of me, head over heels and away, so that my first teacher became himself almost apish in consequence; he soon had to abandon my instruction and be removed to a mental hospital. Fortunately he was soon discharged.

But I used up a great many teachers, indeed even several at once. When I had become more confident of my abilities, with the public already following my progress and my future beginning to look bright, I engaged instructors on my own account, established them in five communicating rooms and learned from them all simultaneously, by leaping continually from one room to the other.

The progress I made! Those rays of knowledge penetrating from every side into my awakening brain! I will not deny it: it gladdened my heart. But I must also admit: I did not overrate it, not even then, and how much the less do I do so today. By dint of exertions as yet unequalled upon this earth I have attained the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, yet it is something, indeed, in so far as it has helped me out of my cage and provided me with this special kind of way out, the human way. There is an excellent idiom in German: to slip off into the undergrowth; that is what I did, I slipped off into the undergrowth. I had no other way to go, always provided that freedom was not to be my choice.

If I consider my development and the goal it has so far reached, I can neither complain nor can I feel satisfied. With my hands in my trouser pockets, my bottle of wine on the table, I half lie, half sit in my rocking-chair and look out of the window. If a visitor comes, I receive him politely. My manager sits in the ante-room; when I ring he comes

and listens to what I have to say. In the evening there is almost always a performance, and the success I enjoy would probably be hard to pass. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from informal gatherings with friends, a little half-trained chimpanzee is awaiting me and I enjoy her company after the fashion of apes. By day I have no wish to see her; for she has that wild, refused look of the trained animal in her eye; no one but me can recognize it, and it is more than I can bear.

On the whole I have at least achieved what I set out to achieve. Let it not be said that it was not worth the effort. In any case, I am not asking anyone's judgement, I wish only to spread knowledge, I am only reporting; to you, too, esteemed gentlemen of the academy, I have only made a report.

THE COAL-SCUTTLE RIDER

ALL THE COAL USED UP; the coal-scuttle empty; the shovel now meaningless; the stove breathing out cold; the room inflated with frosty air; trees beyond the window rigid with rime; the sky a silver shield against anyone looking for help from there. I must have coal; I can't be allowed to freeze to death; behind me is that pitiless stove, before me the equally pitiless sky, as a result I must ride out at all speed between them and seek help from the coal-merchant in the middle. However, his senses have already become dull to my usual appeals; I shall have to prove to him in detail that I have no single grain of coal-dust left, and thus what he means to me is the very sun in the firmament. I must come like the beggar who appears on the doorstep with a death-rattle in his throat, and proposes to expire there, so that the cook in the grand house makes up her mind to give him the dregs of the last coffee-pot; just so must the coal-merchant, furious, yet touched by some gleam of the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', fling a shovelful into my scuttle.

My manner of approach must decide the matter; so I ride off on my coal-scuttle. As a coal-scuttle rider, with my hands up on the handle, the simplest kind of bridle, I steer myself with some difficulty down the stairs; but once below, my scuttle rises up, superbly, superbly; camels, couched low on the ground, cannot rise up more proudly, shaking themselves under the stick of their driver. Off we go through the icy streets at a steady trot; often I am lifted as high as the first storey of the houses; never do I sink to the level of the front