

Monkey Business

(First Presented to The Red Circle in 1992)

Alan Rettig

This is by way of a “Golden Oldie.” An old friend from my working days, Ann Stingle, was cleaning out her files recently and sent me the text of a short presentation we made together here at the Red Circle 26 years ago this week.

I had almost forgotten about it, but I thought it was worth resurrecting this evening. So let’s go back to March 27, 1992. . .

I rise tonight to place some information before you that has only just recently come to light. It was, in fact, just the day before yesterday that my colleague and fellow admirer of Sherlock Holmes, Ann Stingle, walked into my office holding two letters and told me she’d like to read them to me (very Watsonian, I thought). As she did so, their post-Canonical significance quickly became clear to me – as it obviously had to her. When I asked how she had obtained them she would give no clear reply, but only a mumbled reference to a locked dispatch box.

All of us have read at one time or another various musings about the medical plausibility of all the monkey business in “The Creeping Man.” Could Professor Presbury ever have taken on such incredible characteristics and performed such amazing feats by injecting serum drawn from primates? And if he did, why has monkey juice not replaced anabolic steroids as the drug of choice for Olympic athletes?

Well, the correspondence currently in hand may indeed provide fertile new fields for speculation regarding the creeping man – with perhaps a nod to Tonga thrown in along the way. Since we only came into possession of the letters two days ago, no serious scholarship along these lines has yet been performed, but I feel it crucial to lay the actual documents before the Red Circle at this time.

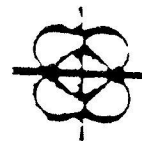
I have told you that two letters have come to light. There was obviously also a third letter – actually the first in the series – that is not available to us. However, we can safely infer that this first letter was sent by Dr. John Hearn, head of an organization called the Wisconsin Regional Primate Research Center, to a group in Canada called the Primate World Relief and Development Fund. That letter – which was evidently a form letter – requested the Development Fund to provide information on their work for inclusion in the *International Directory of Primatology*, which is published by the Wisconsin outfit.

The round of correspondence that followed the original letter is what we have here tonight. As I said, its Sherlockian significance is obvious in the Darwinian sense, and its relevance is compounded by its connection with-- well, let's just see. Here's the response to the Primate Research Center. . .

The Anglican Church of Canada

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Primate

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John Hearn, Director
Wisconsin Regional Primate Research Centre
1223 Capitol Court
Madison, Wisconsin
U.S.A. 53715-1299

December 11, 1991

Dear Dr. Hearn:

Thank you for your letter of December 4 addressed to Dr. George Cram of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund in which you seek information for your International Directory of Primatology.

I should perhaps inform you that the term 'primate' in our context refers to the senior archbishop and chief pastor of the Anglican Church of Canada. The Relief and Development Fund over which he presides is an agency for the alleviation of global poverty and hunger on behalf of Anglican Christians in this country.

I think the primates in your study are perhaps of a different species. While it is true that our primate occasionally enjoys bananas, I have never seen him walk with his knuckles on the ground or scratch himself publicly under the armpits. He does have three children, but this is a far cry from 'breeding colonies of primates' as your research project mentions. Like you we do not import our primates from the wild, however. They are elected from among the bishops of our church. This is occasionally a cause of similar, though arcane, comment.

The subject of primate biology might be of great importance in your field but, alas, not so in ours. There are a mere 28 Anglican primates in the whole world. They are all males, of course, but so far we have had no problems of reproduction. They include such distinguished persons as the Most Reverend and Right Honourable George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Capetown, South Africa. Have you sent letters to them? More importantly, have they responded? They can, I believe, all read and write by themselves so perhaps this might distort your data.

Thank you for writing. I wonder if your extremely efficient database might need just a little refining?

Kindest Regards,

The Reverend Michael Ingham
Principal Secretary
to the Primate

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John P. Hearn
Professor and Director
(68) 263-3500

December 19, 1991

The Reverend Michael Ingham
Principal Secretary to the Primate
The Anglican Church of Canada
65 Jarvis Street
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2J6
CANADA

International Directory of Primatology

Dear Reverend Ingham:

Thank you for your letter of 11 December in which you clarify the taxonomic position of the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada. We will adjust our data base so that you receive no further enquiries concerning the reproductive status, sex ratio, age structure or composition of your group. In our zeal to develop a comprehensive directory, we have strayed on this occasion from the arboreal to the spiritual.

In the meantime, we are concerned that the Anglican Primate group has only 28 members worldwide. This places the species in the red data book of IUCN as highly endangered. No doubt divine guidance will deliver both survival and expansion in the future. I will write again only as we expand our own study of male hierarchies in captive primates.

Our correspondence is not the first such ambiguity. In 1988, when I was serving as President of the International Primatological Society, I received an epistle meant for the Primate of All England. I forwarded the letter to Dr. Runcie at Lambeth Palace with the query 'Yours or mine?' I await his reply.

We do have mutual interests. Global poverty and hunger in the human species, set to increase in population from 1 billion in 1850, 2 billion in 1950, 5 billion now to 10 to 14 billion by 2050 has direct consequences in habitat destruction for the thousands of endangered species, primates included, that we seek to conserve. Much of our knowledge in human health comes from studies in nonhuman primates. We have yet to demonstrate enough wisdom, in balancing the equation, to allow the existence of sufficient genetic diversity even to ensure our own future survival. Divine assistance is required.

In this regard at least perhaps we can bless each others efforts; and I concede immediately your precedence and technical superiority in the art of blessing. Thank you again for your letter which has given us and will give many primatologists a great deal of amusement. I hope we may meet someday.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Sincerely yours,


John Hearn

JPH:ec

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