Pythagoras

By Frederick W. Mitchell.

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Some years since there was no little excitement throughout the South, caused by the announcement that monkeys had been proved to be wholly capable as cotton pickers and of course much cheaper than native labor. All sorts of stories were in the air, some partly true and many wholly false, until finally some newer and later sensation relegated this one to forgetfulness.

A couple of years since, I received a visit from my old California partner, who had settled in the South, and now owned one of the finest small plantations in the State. From him I heard the story first hand, as he himself was responsible for it.

As we sat around the blazing log fire in my Virginia home, and smoked and talked of our early days in California and the Territories, he suddenly broke out into his hearty laugh and said: "Fred, did you ever hear of my monkey trade, and how they picked my cotton for me, and raised merry hob all through our part of the state?" I replied that since he asked the question, I seemed to recollect having read something to that effect, only that it was but a very faint impression, and had probably been dismissed from my mind as a "fake" story.

"No," he answered, "it was absolutely true, and I yet believe it could be made a thorough and complete success, not only in the cotton fields, but in large orchards and perhaps among the smaller fruits and berries.

"You know," he continued, "that beside my plantation I have several good mines in Georgia, the working of which while not of a bonanza nature, adds quite materially to my income.

"One morning a short thick-set man of forty, whose rolling gait plainly betokened the sailor, walked up my roadway and to the plazza, where I sat talking with my overseer and enjoying my morning pipe. The two large fields of cotton on either side of the road were about ready to pick, and I was busy planning upon which field I should commence, or whether I had better divide my force and offer some inducement for the party bringing in the largest quantity in the quickest time and leaving the cleanest picked field.

"The visitor touched his cap with the forefinger of his right hand, and asked in fairly good English, 'Are you the one the darkies call the Captain?' I said, 'Yes, what can I do for you?' He came up the steps uninvited, drew a chair to my side and handed me half a dozen big, black cigars, which, I may add, proved about the finest I ever have smoked. 'Captain,' he said, 'I want to sell you 125 monkeys, or rather I want to trade them for an interest in the Buffalo gold mine. I am an old miner and am tired of knocking round. I was through the Buffalo yesterday and while she isn't the richest in the world, a few thousand dollars would open her out wonderfully.'

"'Even admitting that I were willing to take you as my mining partner,' I asked, 'what the devil would I do with 125 monkeys? I think I could use one as a playmate for the children. They feel pretty lonely since their mother's death.'

"He waved his hands toward the two big fields with their snow white covering.

"'Speak out, man,' I said. 'I've no time for any nonsense.'

"'Well,' he continued, 'I was never more earnest in my life. Monkeys, as you know, are great imitators; all of my 125 have picked cotton on an island in the Pacific, where I was stranded four years ago, and their leader is as intelligent as a man. I will guarantee that if you will place him by the side of your best picker, at the close of the day, he will be at least one hundred pounds ahead. Wait now,' placing his hand on my knee, 'your superintendent at the mine says you have offered a half interest for $10,000.00. I value my monkeys at $100 each, but I will make you an even exchange. I will oversee their work for the first three days, and if twice as much cotton has not been picked as by an equal number of darkies, you may call the trade off and I'll make no charge for the picking.'

"I won't bother you with the details," said my old partner as he refilled and lighted his pipe. "You remember I am a great believer in the Darwinian theory. I like novelty and never refuse to investigate a new idea because it appears to be out of the common. I did investigate this one, very thoroughly, and paid several visits to the vessel where the monkeys were kept. I could almost converse with the big leader, who proved to be the finest and most intelligent animal I ever saw. The more like a human being I treated him, the more attached to me he seemed to become, while I noticed that he at once resented any familiarity towards me by the others.

"After some thought as to how the darkies would regard this remarkable innovation of what they might consider their rights, I made the trade. In company with the sailor who answered to the name of Fernando, I ordered my darkies out onto the lawn and explained to them what I proposed to do. I added, I wanted neither them nor any of the men on the adjoining plantations to get it into their nigger brains that this would in any way affect their positions. It had taken this man years of hard patient labor to educate these animals to work, and probably no others would ever be imported for such a purpose; that none of my men who cared to work would be discharged, as there would always be plenty of extra work at the mines, and I tried to explain to them that this was solely an experiment of my own. After the cotton was picked, if it resulted as Fernando said it would, I should take a contract to pick my neighbor's 100-acre peach orchard. What we should find for our Simian friends to do during the cold weather would have to be left for future consideration.

THE BIG APE GRASPED THE DARKEY'S WRIST.

"Most of my darkies looked upon the whole matter as a joke and went away laughing and jollying each other, but a few muttered and shook their heads, and acted as if they might prove troublesome. One of the latter said, evidently intending that I should hear, that he'd be damned if he'd work on a plantation where they employed beasts.

"I had had trouble with the man at several different times. He was a powerfully built negro, nearly six feet four inches in his bare feet, and when not in liquor, holding the record of the fastest and cleanest cotton picker in the section. But he had a very surly disposition, and was too fond of threatening his fellow workmen with his big knife, which was half as long as an Austrian sabre, and which he kept as sharp as a razor. I had cautioned him about this and told him that if I ever saw him draw that knife on any one, black or white, I would shoot him without warning. He was well aware of my facility with a revolver and was generally obedient to my orders. After his remark above, however, I told him that I was getting tired of his insubordination, and ordered him to report to the cashier, get his pay and for the future keep off the plantation.

"About two o'clock on the third day, Fernando came driving up the road with three two-horse wagons of what proved the funniest and most unique freight that ever entered our gates. The occupants of the cages were evidently a little frightened at their new surroundings, and their chatterings were quite subdued. Old Pythagoras, however, their leader, sat on the front seat by the side of Fernando, as quiet and dignified as any judge, and seemingly as stoical as an American Indian. But his eyes beamed cordially and he smiled as nearly as a monkey could smile, as he swung himself from the seat and bounded up the steps to greet me.

"The monkeys were permitted to run and romp for a couple of hours, their leader sitting by my side most of the time, smoking one of our pipes with much seeming enjoyment and after the manner of a sober old Dutchman. He occasionally laid it aside and went out to his family evidently forbidding them to do this or that or ordering them to be more quiet, at least expressing some sort of supervision of their actions.

"At seven o'clock he and Fernando went among them, giving some sharp commands, and they went quietly to their cages, which were fastened by Fernando. The rest of us sat on the porch smoking, and part of the time I played on my banjo, which latter appeared to greatly please my visitor. Soon after nine, as we were preparing to go to our rooms, the monkey chief, Pythagoras, pulled my coat sleeve and walked ahead of me to mine. Taking a blanket that hung upon a peg, he motioned as if he wanted to take it back to the piazza. I nodded my permission and he went out with it, spread it and almost asked me in so many words if he could sleep upon it. I laughingly said: 'Make yourself perfectly at home, old fellow,' at which he grinned back at me as if he accepted it as a compliment, and curled himself upon the blanket with a great grunt of satisfaction, where I left him.

"The next morning Fernando brought out the monkeys, divided them into two gangs, and commenced the picking. Pythagoras would lead one gang for a while and then hurry over to the head of the other, running back to see if any cotton had been skipped and like the most competent overseer, keeping a watchful supervision over the whole work. Nothing like it had ever been known on any plantation.

"We stopped an hour at noon and by night, by actual weight all former records had been beaten by over one-half. What also appeared to me very remarkable was that the pickers seemed just as lively and active when the day's work was over, as when it commenced. That evening was a repetition of the former, but before retiring I thought I saw some men moving around near the house, and twice Pythagoras uttering a low grunt darted down the steps, returning and shaking his head each time as if something disturbed him. Nothing, however, occurred, and I finally went into my room and lay down, although but partially undressing.

"It could not have been very long after midnight when I awoke with that indescribable feeling that someone was moving about the room. I had closed my windows on retiring, but now felt the cool night air blowing soft across my face. As I mechanically grasped my revolver, cocked it and raised myself suddenly to a sitting posture, I felt the point of a sharp instrument piercing my neck. I faintly heard the sound of a shot, the room seemed full of smoke and everything went black as I fell back senseless.

"Several days had passed before I opened my eyes to returning consciousness and what occurred during that interval, I have learned only from those to whose untiring care, assisted by my naturally strong constitution, I owe my life.

"The darkey I had discharged, had crawled in through my window with the evident intention of robbery and murder. My watch and purse lay on the floor and my necktie with a valuable diamond pin had been thrust in the pocket of his blouse. Pythagoras had evidently heard the noise, slight as it was, or perhaps his sense of smell was, as Fernando said, extremely acute, and his devotion to his master's friend brought him at once to my bedside.

"I do not know whether or not monkeys can see in the dark, but if not Pythagoras's intuitions must at least have given him a sort of second sight, for when Fernando and the overseer rushed in with lights, they saw that the big ape had grasped the darkey's right wrist which held the knife, with his right hand, and twisted and broken the wrist in spite of the darkey's great strength, while the long fingers of his left hand were pressed tightly around the throat of the darkey whom he had evidently strangled with comparative ease. All would have been well had I lain still, but my sudden rising had not only plunged the knife into my own neck, but caused the fall of the revolver which fired the fatal shot, the big bullet plowing through to faithful Pythagoras's brain and killing him instantly.

"We gave the body of the darkey to some of his friends, but Pythagoras was buried under a beautiful live oak, and upon the mound, after I recovered, I placed a marble slab inscribing upon it the words 'Faithful to the Death.'

"Oh, you ask what became of the rest of the monkeys and my experiment! Well, after the doctor said I would soon be all right again and permitted me to walk about, I had Fernando take them out and try to resume the cotton picking, which the darkies had meanwhile nearly completed. They had been very uneasy and had shown so much restlessness that the morning and evening hours of relaxation had been abandoned.

"They would give low plaintive moans and cry out like children when hurt and when released instead of romping and jumping as at first, would gather in groups and chatter together as if talking over some trouble. Then they would troop down to the corner of the plantation and point away off towards the South. So Fernando said he would not let them out until I was well enough to give the matter my personal attention. That morning Fernando took the lead and spoke kindly to them and tried to act as nearly as possible as old Pythagoras had done, but it proved uphill work. I was sitting on a fallen tree near that timber over to the left partially concealed by some bushes, watching the work and wondering how it would all turn out, when I saw two of the monkeys skulking in my direction, evidently trying to escape to the woods. I had my revolver with me, not on their account, but because some of the darkey's friends had been heard to make threats, and as the two monkeys came near to me, stood up and ordered them back. The larger one, a female, instead of retreating as I supposed she would, immediately picked up a big stone and threw it at me. Though the distance was considerable, and she must have been surprised to see me, the aim was so true that it knocked my hat off, and for a moment I thought I was to be the principal in another life and death struggle. As she drew her arm back for another throw, at the same time advancing rapidly, I fired. She pitched forward uttering a most unearthly screech and in a moment all the other monkeys were flying wildly to the southerly point of the woods and shortly had vanished entirely from view.

"What finally became of them? We never knew positively, but hunters and travellers report that the Everglades in Florida for the past few years have been full of monkeys, and that they appear tame and friendly, but are in mortal terror of a gun and if the traveller approaches too close they shake their heads violently as if saying: 'No more cotton picking for us.'

"Fernando was at first quite disconsolate at his loss but I made him foreman of the Buffalo mine, gave him a generous share of the stock, and he has proven a splendid man for the position, so that the returns are very satisfactory to each of us. Except when we think of the sad fate and mourn the untimely loss of that remarkable Darwinian Specimen of Evolution, we can afford to laugh at our first attempt to utilize the Missing Link."

Kermit Roosevelt.

Kermit Roosevelt, second son of the President, is to a considerable portion of the public the least known member of the Roosevelt family and yet he is one of the most interesting. Kermit is a manly lad who is now in preparatory school and who will within a few years follow in the steps of his older brother, Theodore, Jr., by entering Harvard. He bids fair to prove a stronger lad physically than "Teddy" and has always gone in for athletics and outdoor life in general. Not long ago he went on a hunting expedition in the Northwest, under the guidance of a man who had been a companion of his father in his ranching days and the big game bagged by Kermit proved conclusively that he in time will be as good a sportsman as his father.

Coming home from this trip Kermit politely gave up his sleeping car berth to an old lady who boarded the train after all the berths had been sold. All the junior members of the Roosevelt family are fond of pets, but Kermit goes ahead of all the others in his love of domestic animals. Dogs have always been his favorites and there has seldom been a time when he has not had one or more canine followers, these animals being transported from Oyster Bay to Washington each autumn and back again to the summer home in the spring.

KERMIT ROOSEVELT.

Kermit Roosevelt is also an excellent horseman. He learned to ride on the President's old pony Diamond,—a sturdy black animal that served as the President's mount when he was a young man. Old Diamond is now a pensioner in the White House stables and when Kermit goes riding with his father,—as he does whenever he is home for a vacation,—he uses one of the saddle animals in the White House stables, his preference being for Wyoming, the handsome mount presented to President Roosevelt by his friends and admirers in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Time Honored Use for Kerosene.

A fire occurred on premises rented by Jews in London. The circumstances were somewhat suspicious and an agent of the insurance company was sent to investigate. He interviewed the senior partner, and also the junior partner, as to the probable cause of the fire. This is his report: "I find that the senior partner thinks it was caused by an arc light on the second floor; the junior partner thinks it was caused by an incandescent light on the first floor—but my opinion is that it was caused by an Israelite in the basement!"

Life.

(G. E. M.)

I am a grain of quinine, white as the virgin snow that falls from Heaven.
My name is Life. Forth I go into the fever-stricken camps, where stalks disease.
And do my kindly unseen work.
Under my magic touch the germs of death are vanquished
And shrink into themselves.
Where lies a human tossing on a bed of thorns,
Thoughts whirling tumultuous through his disordered brain;
A woman, wan and languished, with a heavy eye and yellow skin,
The wasting fever hard ahold her life:
Or may, perchance, a youth in southern climes,
Struck down by that insidious foe that stalks the swamps, Malaria.
And lying stretched upon a couch of skins or Spanish moss,
Calling in wandering accents,
"Mother," "Sister," "Sweetheart";—
Unto these I go, and waging 'cessant warfare
Upon these tiny molecules of death,
I conquer;—I alone, and win them back again
To Life's green shores.
search through every nerve and fibre of their being
And deal a blow to every animalcule
There working at his devilish task of Death,
And breaking down Life's tissues.
And then, the cause removed, kind Nature reasserts herself,
And brighter glance and ruddy glow return to cheeks
Long wan with sickness.
Dear friends and comrades, doctors, nurses,
Crowd round and say:
"Saved his life. By our good care,
And wondrous skill, he's living yet."

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A Good Retriever.

A gentleman once possessed a valuable sporting dog which was extremely clever in the retrieving of game. The owner, however, was a remarkably bad shot, and one day, on firing both barrels hastily at a rabbit, he heard a mournful howl. The next moment his dog appeared, carrying a black object in his mouth, and laid it carefully at his master's feet. The animal had retrieved his own tail.

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