



# The Tale of Tails

*A Fable*

By LINCOLN STEFFENS

Drawings by O. E. CESARE



IN the olden days of long, long ago, before men appeared on the earth, when the most promising people here were the monkeys, then, as now, there was trouble and a great struggle.

The tribes increased, the forests became overcrowded, the trees possessed. Some monkeys had to go to the ground. They hung on, clung on, clamored, fought. They howled till the wilderness was filled with their cries. And it was no use. There simply was not room for them all in the trees. More and more of them had to go under and stay under. And they did. And a strange thing happened.

The change of environment changed the habits of the down-and-outs, and the change of habits changed their ideas. They had to walk: so they said that walking was right; it was wrong to climb and cling.

“A monkey,” they declared, “the noblest work of God [up till now]—no self-respecting monkey should scramble around on all fours. He should stand erect, and upright go his way.”

And this became the mode. Especially among the younger monkeys, who could not find places in the trees, it was the fad to walk upright on the ground, under the broad branches where the older monkeys sat fat in possession. It was hard. Built to run on all fours, the walking apes had to brace themselves up with sticks, which they carried, first, as canes, afterward, as clubs. And even then, even with these props, they wearied of the unnatural pose and had to crawl off, sometimes on their hands and knees, to lie down and rest their aching backs.

The common, sensible monkeys saw this and jeered. They pelted the cranks with gibes, with green or rotten fruit, and hard-shell nuts. And then, when the radicals defended themselves in kind, the conservatives got together and indignantly chased the trouble-makers off their very legs. They ran them up trees, whence the owners cast them down as trespassers.

This was persecution, and the persecution raised the new fashion into a cult. The cult became "a cause," something like a religion. And the symbol of the new order was the hidden tail.

The New Monkeys reasoned that, since climbing and clinging were wrong, and tails were useful only for climbing and clinging, it was wrong to have a tail; so they would not allow themselves to use or to show their tails. That, then, was the sign of the new Progressive movement—the hidden tail.

How the old-fashioned monkeys did laugh! And it was indeed ludicrous, because, of course, the new monkeys could not conceal their tails, not

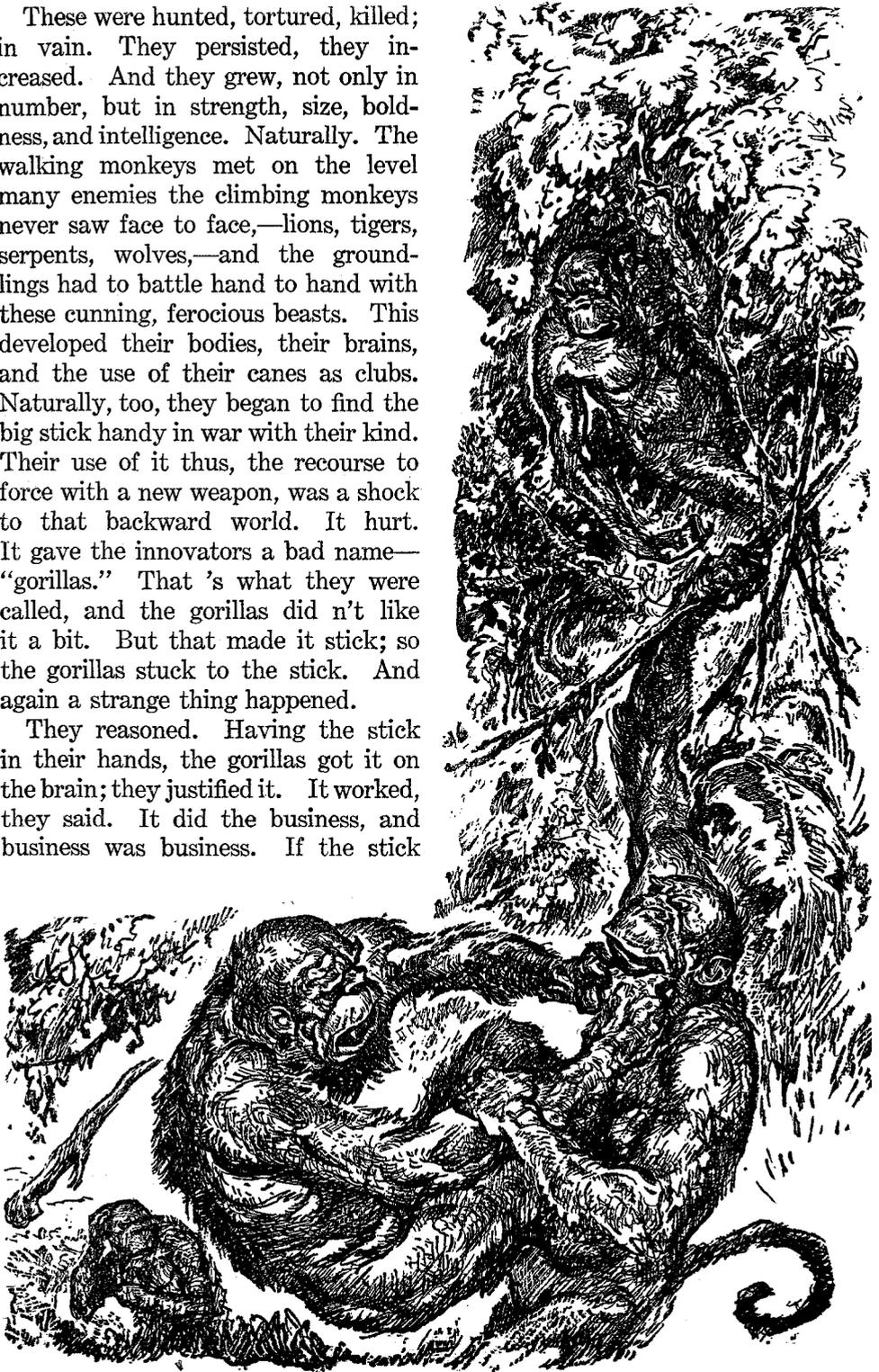
entirely. Tails were worn long and thick in that period, and when they were wound up, no matter how tight, they still showed somewhat. And they were awfully in the way. A bulky roll of painful tail made walking almost as awkward then as thinking is to-day. It was folly, the reactionaries said; it was carrying the thing too far; it was against monkey nature.

And the practical, old, successful monkeys, who saw the funny side of all this pretension and posturing, they felt the danger, too—the menace to respectable life in the safe and sane trees of their fathers. They did their best to check the growing evil. They reasoned with the leaders; they offered a few of them soft places on the lower limbs of old trees which bore little fruit, and some of the older, more trusted leaders of the discontented masses rose to these promotions and became successful and sensible. But there were agitators who could not be reasoned with, and there was always the low-down mob that wanted to pull all the monkeys in the world down to their own low level.



These were hunted, tortured, killed; in vain. They persisted, they increased. And they grew, not only in number, but in strength, size, boldness, and intelligence. Naturally. The walking monkeys met on the level many enemies the climbing monkeys never saw face to face,—lions, tigers, serpents, wolves,—and the groundlings had to battle hand to hand with these cunning, ferocious beasts. This developed their bodies, their brains, and the use of their canes as clubs. Naturally, too, they began to find the big stick handy in war with their kind. Their use of it thus, the recourse to force with a new weapon, was a shock to that backward world. It hurt. It gave the innovators a bad name—"gorillas." That 's what they were called, and the gorillas did n't like it a bit. But that made it stick; so the gorillas stuck to the stick. And again a strange thing happened.

They reasoned. Having the stick in their hands, the gorillas got it on the brain; they justified it. It worked, they said. It did the business, and business was business. If the stick



struck the conservatives on a sensitive spot, it sent them scampering, screaming all up in the air. That spread confusion above, yes, but it cleared the ground for further progress. In other words, might made right.

The decent world was scandalized. The climbers lashed their tails to the topmost tree-tops, the lions and tigers lashed theirs in the air, the snakes stood pat on theirs and hissed their protests. It was immoral. Even the more upright of the upstanding monkeys would not, could not, stand for what the whole world denounced as gorilla warfare. No; they dropped their sticks, unfurled their hidden tails, and joined forces with the anti-force pacifists in the regular war to enforce law and order.

That settled it. This, the so-called parting of the ways, was the beginning of the end of the struggle. They could not see it so then; they were too near it all. Neither party grasped the full import of the crisis. They would not let one another alone; they wanted to "get together and agree." So they battled on, each side striving con-

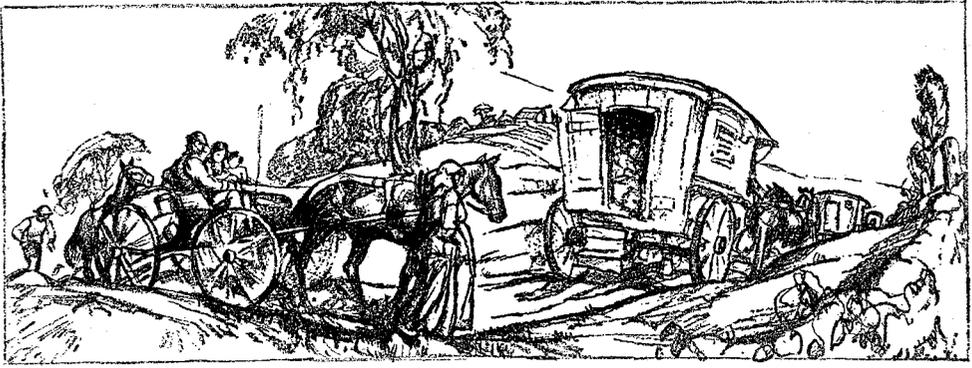
sistently for its own ideas, ideals, and principles. Right was right, as it is to-day. The radicals, outnumbered and beaten, went right on contending that monkeys,—not only they, the reds, but the whites also, and the browns and the blacks, all monkeys,—should let go, come down, and stand up, and lose their tails. While these, the conservatives, moderates, and liberals, kept right on repeating what was perfectly true.

A wise, old hundred-per-cent. monkey said it for all time. Sitting one day in his family tree, with his tail, his kin, and his kind close around him, he looked sadly down on the senseless struggle below, and he put into permanent form the public opinion of his age on all this hidden-tail business.

"Humph!" he grunted, "monkeys have got tails, monkeys always did have tails, and," waving his tail proudly, "monkeys always will have tails."

And he was everlastingly right. This happened eons ago, but monkeys still have tails. Those gorillas became men.





## The American Gipsy

By KONRAD BERCOVICI, *Author of "GHITZA"*

*Drawings by O. F. HOWARD*



IN the last fifty years considerable attention has been paid by ethnologists, folklorists, and philologists to the Gipsies of Europe. The relation of Gipsies to the folk-lore of the world has been traced and followed in so many directions that it has formed a web in which the folk-lore of all the peoples with whom the Gipsies have come into contact is caught.

The practical religion of all European peasants and poor people, most of their customs, ceremonies, and superstitions, home medicines, frequently bordering on shamanism, were no doubt inspired, if not altogether conceived, by the Gipsies. Ever since their appearance in Europe, the Gipsies have been the colporteurs and disseminators of witchcraft, incantations, and a belief in their magic powers. It was largely due to this that the Gipsies were hated and persecuted in Europe by the established faiths and religions of the countries they visited. The peasants feared them, accusing them of the most unspeakable vices, but never hesitated to appeal to them

in cases of disease among themselves or their cattle, and paid with gold and silver for the use of witchcraft against their enemies, for love-potions, hate-potions, ointments, and a thousand other things of like kind and value. At all times the European peasant has had a greater belief in the Gipsy's rain-bringing powers than in the prayers of the priests in days of drought.

Almost all the incantations of the Italians, Slavonians, Rumanians, and Bulgarians are of Gipsy origin. The fetishism of the peasantry of Europe and of a certain stratum of the population the world over, the belief in relics, in lucky stones, in rabbits' feet, in corpse candles, hemp ropes, and amulets, the thousand and one variations of customs and beliefs concerning the handling of a knife or the lighting of a match, the superstition against shadow-crossing, the reading of good fortune in sea-shells and cards—all these things and others of like character were given to the world by the Gipsies. It was they who infiltrated