

Waterton's Letter to Mrs Wombell ref Jenny

Charles Waterton Letter to Mrs Wombwell (of Wombwell's Menagerie)  
(written 01 Nov 1855 1, The Cliff Scarborough), published in the Scarborough Gazette 8th November 1855. Also included in Heads and Tales: Or Anecdotes and Stories of Quadrupeds and Other Beasts (1870), Adam White.

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To Mrs. Wombwell,

Madam,

I am truly sorry that the inclemency of the weather has prevented the inhabitants of this renowned watering-place from visiting your wonderful gorilla or brown orang-outang.

I have passed two hours in its company, and I have been gratified beyond expression.

Would that all lovers of natural history could get a sight of it, as, possibly, they may never see another of the same species in this country.

It differs widely in one respect from all other orang-outangs which have been exhibited in England - namely, that, when on the ground, it never walks on the soles of its fore-feet, but on the knuckles of the toes of those feet; and those toes are doubled up like the closed fist of a man. This must be a painful position; and, to relieve itself, the animal catches hold of visitors, and clings caressingly to Miss Blight, who exhibits it. Here then, it is at rest with toes of the fore-feet performing their natural functions, which they never do when the animal is on the ground.

Hence I draw the conclusion that this singular quadruped, like the sloth, is not a walker on the ground of its own free-will, but by accident only.

No doubt whatever it is born, and lives, and dies aloft, amongst the trees in the forest of Africa.

Put it on a tree, and then it will immediately have the full use of the toes of its fore-feet. Place it on the ground, and then you will see that the toes of the fore-feet become useless, as I have already described.

That it may retain its health, and thus remunerate you for the large sum which you have expended in the purchase of it, is, madam, the sincere hope of your obedient servant and well wisher.

Charles Waterton  
Scarborough Cliff, No. 1, Nov. 1, 1855.

P.S. You are quite at liberty to make what use you choose of this letter I have written for your own benefit, and for the good of natural history.

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