
Wit and Wisdom Mixed with Folly

Here is an irritating, exciting, amusing and instructive book. But it is a book to be read with critical faculties full awake. Here, for example, is how the author holds up a rival theory to gentle ridicule:

"Since their arms had already undergone a process of shrinkage, owing to the lack of boughs from which to suspend the body weight, the calcium deposition and growth were concentrated in the lower extremity. Hence the arms lagged and the legs grew enormously, involving the perplexed prehumans in a postural dilemma. They had their choice of progressing in a pyramidal, quadrupedal posture, with the nose barely off the ground and what ought to be the base of the trunk elevated toward the inhospitable skies, or of attempting to balance upon their hypertrophied hind legs and to wobble through life on an unstable and shifting base of support. Owing to certain difficulties with the law of gravity encountered in depressing the intaking end of the digestive tract below the outgoing, these creatures stood up, thereby exposing a vast area of vulnerable front to a hostile world. We need not accept this theory of the evolution of human posture through mineral deficiency, but the revelation of anatomical difficulties encountered cannot fail to evoke the sympathetic understanding of our anthropoid ape critics."

Now that strikes this reviewer as splendid scientific polemic. Literary skill is used to enliven a scientific argument. But Hooton uses his wit not only to make scientific theories interesting but to broadcast his prejudices in fields where he has no scientific competence. Like all wits, Hooton is a cynic but not even a cynic (if he is also a scientist) has the right to such flagrant dogmatism as that "crime is increasing enormously." Sorting bones, even human skull bones, in the Peabody Museum does not qualify one to assert that the masses are incapable of ever understanding evolution. When he talks anatomical structure, Hooton's hereditarianism is moderate and aware of complexities; when he comes to the more intricate problem of the functions which relate to those structures, he becomes suddenly possessed of pontifical answers. The time surely has passed when any gifted amateur can dispose of the vexed problem of the relation of education to an intelligence, deemed wholly inherited, in a single deft paragraph.

Yet one can almost forgive him even this in return for his keen analysis of the race problem, his eloquent and sane eugenics, and for the many chuckles the book affords. But let the reader beware lest he find himself as this reviewer did, chuckling loudest when Hooton is wittily expressing one's own prejudices.

—H. B. ENGLISH.

Apes, Men and Morons, by Ernest A. Hooton. x+307 pp. New York, G. P. Putnam's, 1937. \$3.00.