

The New York Times
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HOPE FOR OTA BENGA; IF LITTLE, HE'S NO FOOL

And Has Good Reason for Staying in the White Man's Land.

WON'T BE AN ENTRÉE HERE

But His Chief in Africa May Die Soon and the Custom Is to Have a Cannibal Feast.

Inquiries made yesterday by a NEW YORK TIMES reporter regarding the health and progress of Ota Benga, at the Howard Colored Orphan Asylum at Dean Street and Troy Avenue, Brooklyn, resulted in the discovery that the pigmy of the checkered career is confronted by a greater problem than was at first supposed.

Ota Benga, it was thought, had always a loophole of escape from the Zoological Park and exhibitions and asylums. That loophole was a return to his native land. But it now appears that Ota Benga would rather go anywhere than back to the tall palms. He has a suspicion that he would be made very welcome there: in fact, he thinks that the cannibal tribe to which he belongs has the pot already on the fire for him.

When he went back from the St. Louis Exposition with Prof. Charles P. Verner he found that he had no relatives left. He found, too, that the tribal chief was getting on in years, and that when he died there would be a few persons eaten to rest his soul. Dr. J. H. Gordon, who is in charge of the orphan asylum where Ota Benga now resides, says he understands that this cannibal custom is observed for the propitiation of the spirits that rule the destinies of Ota Benga's people. Ota, who ought to know, swears that he stands a good chance if propinquity permits, of being one of the propitiations.

He admits that he does not like the white man's magic, and is not particularly enamored of a country where cars move without the aid of a yoke of oxen, but, on the whole, he opines, it is rather better than a country where a citizen may become an entree without his consent.

Aside from that, however, Ota Benga is apparently delighted with the Colored Orphan Asylum. He prefers it to the Zoo. He is getting a new suit of clothes to-day and has already received a dollar watch. He can shake hands and say "How de do!" in accents so startlingly positive that one is tempted to make a further remark. In that case, Ota looks wise, observes that it is now "ten minutes past two," and adds a remark that sounds like:

"Bim bawya poom bok! Cluck! Eeem bam!"

"Nobody but Prof. Verner understands when he makes noises like that," said Dr. Gordon.

The TIMES reporter at this point began to fill his pipe. Ota Benga grinned and also drew out a pipe.

"Baccy?" he chuckled, and gratefully pocketed an extra pipeful.

"Oh, yes he's human!" said Dr. Gordon, "in that and in many other ways, too. He used to be naked, but Prof. Verner told him that in this country it was not customary to walk the streets nude, and also that it was very vulgar to smoke a pipe in the presence of ladies. He has become

such a stickler for convention now that we have to tap at his room door before entering, and you would laugh to see him put that pipe away when a woman appears on the horizon.

“On the whole we have great hopes for him. We thought he might be unmanageable, but he is more intelligent than many people I know and quicker to catch an idea and see its point.

“We will not try to teach him much for a while, but rather allow his apparently alert brain to unravel the things he sees all around him. All the time he wants to go for a walk, and he takes an interest even in the way boards are nailed together. When he sees that an iron nail is a good idea he laughs, for he has understood one more trick of the white man’s magic.

“Of course we don’t know what turns of mind he will develop in the next few days, but so far he has been very sensible, and we have a hope that at last he has found a refuge.”