

The New York Times

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TOPICS OF THE TIMES

The Pigmy Is Not the Point

Mr. Hornaday seems to have been little disturbed by the indignant comments which his exhibition of an African homunculus in rather close association with his big monkeys has excited, but the chances are that he will soon find it judicious to heed them and close this part of his show. The question whether there is any real and intrinsic harm in thus grouping the pigmy with animals held by so many to be nearly related to us all is not the one at issue. As to that, the Director has as good right to an opinion as anybody else, but if what he is doing offends certain members of the clergy for one reason, and a considerable number of our lay citizens for another, he, as the head of what is in effect a public institution, is under some obligation to abate the offense.

And apparently it does. To be sure, the expressions of horror and age are somewhat laboriously emitted, and they are justified by eloquence which deals little with fact and much with fancy, but there is some sincerity in it all, and we do not know of any measurable benefits to science that will accrue from the continued display of Ota Benga as the playmate of an orang-outang. Not a few people are coming to look sourly on menageries, anyhow, and to wonder if they are worth while. Those who believe in them, therefore, should be particularly careful to respect the public's sensibilities, and to heed its opinions and even its prejudices.

It is most amusing to not that one reverend colored brother objects to this curious exhibition on the ground that it is an impious effort to lend credibility to Darwin's dreadful theories. To find that there are still alive those who do not accept the greatest of generalizations as a matter of course is now almost as startling as it was in our grandfather's day to find any respectable person who did. The reverend colored brother should be told that evolution, in one form or other, is now taught in the text books of all the schools, and that it is no more debatable than the multiplication table.