



## LEMURS.

By MRS. BRIGHTWEN, Author of "Wild Nature Won by Kindness," etc.

AMONGST the many curious animals I have kept and studied there had never, so far, been a specimen of the monkey tribe. I always feared I could not meet their requirements in the way of food and temperature, and that a proper place for such creatures did not exist at the Grove.

However, the offer of a pair of lemurs tempted me into many consultations and much searching amongst the books in the library, in order to find out all that could be learned about the nature of these animals, and I found myself speculating as to whether it would be possible to make them happy.

Lemurs are inhabitants of the island of Madagascar, where they live in the woods, feeding on fruits. All accounts agree in describing them as quiet gentle creatures, very agile in their movements and nocturnal in their habits.

The word *lemur* was employed by the ancients to describe the unbodied spirits of men, whether beneficent or malignant; the festivals called *lemuria* were appointed for the appeasing and "laying" of ghosts. - The animals received their name from their almost noiseless movements; they would, I suppose, look very ghastly and uncanny as they flitted about on the tree-branches at night.

The more I read about them the more it appeared to me that I must not lightly pass by such an opportunity of obtaining rare subjects for naturalistic study.

So the lemurs were accepted, and I sent a man to the other side of London to bring them, cage and all, with great care to their new home.

Until I knew their size and something about their requirements I could not very well prepare a place for them, and I reckoned on their living in the cage that they came in at least for a few days after their arrival. What, then, was my dismay when the lemurs arrived to find that they were packed in a small hamper, and that no cage had come with them, as it had been found too large to be conveyed by any cab or other sort of carriage.

Plainly the poor animals could not stay in the hamper, and I had nothing large enough to hold them. They were so timid that I was afraid to let them loose in the conservatory; they might have sprung up to the roof and remained there, where it would be cold, and as I had been very specially warned to guard them against draughts, I was puzzled indeed to know what to do with them. At last a large circular linen-basket was found, which made a temporary home until we could think of some better place in which to keep them.

When the hamper was opened the poor frightened creatures were seen, locked in each other's arms, gazing at us with round glassy eyes. It was some days before we could really see what beautiful animals they were, since their timidity was so great that, though they would eat bananas out of my hand gently enough, nothing would induce them to come out of their hiding-place and be friendly.

As soon as possible a bay at one end of the

conservatory was wired in, some tree-branches were fixed for the lemurs to climb upon, and a large plant-case, with glass sides and top and soft hay within, made a cosy retreat when they wished for complete retirement.

It was very enjoyable to let the new pets into their pleasant home. They instantly and fully approved of it, climbing at once up to the highest branch, and gazing down at us with a far happier expression in their great eyes than they had hitherto shown. And now for the first time we could appreciate the beauty of their silky-white fur and wonderful tails.

I found out that these were specimens of the ruffed lemur, the most beautiful of the ten species found in Madagascar. I will try and describe them, though it will not be easy to give a very clear idea of creatures which vary so much in aspect according to the position they adopt.

Sitting on their glass-house, side by side, with their long furry tails coiled around them they looked like two huge Persian cats, but standing or climbing they showed themselves as true monkeys, but far exceeding the ordinary monkey in gracefulness.

Round the head was a full ruff of long white hairs setting off the gentle fox-like face, which was mostly black, as were the small well-shaped hands and feet. Lemurs have four fingers and a thumb on the hands, and the great toe and four smaller ones, as well as the fingers have perfect nails, which makes them look very human.

The thick silky fur was white with large patches of black, and the tail, three-quarters of a yard in length, was precisely like a lady's black fur boa, and was used much in the same way, either laid gracefully across the back, or over the feet, wherever warmth was required.

When food was offered to them they had a curious way of obtaining it when not quite within their reach. The little black hand was stretched out and took a firm but very gentle grasp of my fingers, drawing them nearer until the coveted fruit could be reached, and even if the banana could have been taken direct, they preferred to hold my hand, and did it so prettily I was tempted always to make them reach out for it.

Considering the ghost-like character associated with these animals we thought that "Spectre" and "Phantom" would be appropriate names; they do not however respond to any endearing epithets, and only manifest emotion when a banana is offered for their acceptance.

I fancy they are somewhat unintelligent; they differ greatly from the ordinary type of monkey, in that they sit still by the hour together, and have no idea of mischief or of helping themselves in any way; for instance, a monkey, if feeling cold, will accept a shawl and wrap it round him, finding the comfort of it; but these creatures would sit and shiver, and die of cold before the idea of covering themselves would enter their dull brains.

They are masters of the art of expressing

surprise and contempt. If something is offered to them that they do not like, they bridle up and turn away their heads as much as to say, "Dear me, no! nothing earthly would induce me to take a thing like that, remove it at once!"

My greatest surprise in connection with the lemurs took place about two months after their arrival. I had carried Mungo\* to see them, and carefully holding him by his string I allowed him to stand and gaze at them through the wires.

He had often done this before, and beyond a few angry snorts and their usual grunting sounds they had taken no notice, but on this occasion they both at the same moment set up the most terrific roar that I ever heard. I do not exaggerate when I declare that it really seemed as loud as the roar of a lion at the Zoo. I was close to them, and it was so utterly unexpected I don't think I was ever quite so astonished in all my life. The sound was truly awful, and it lasted for half a minute or more, till I felt completely stunned, and was glad enough to retreat to a quiet room where my nerves could recover from the shock.

I think the Madagascar woods where these animals dwell must be most gruesome places at night, with these black and white creatures flitting about in the branches, abruptly uttering their terrific roars at intervals.

A family quarrel among lemurs must be a thing to remember. Besides this they also give a loud groan now and then, which irresistibly reminds one of Punch's "moaning gipsy in the back-garden." Such a groan must sound additionally weird at night in the dark woods.

When I gave my friends an account of the scare I had had, one of them returned with me to the conservatory to be favoured with a special performance of "Ghosts." Mungo was brought in once more, and up rose the awful sound, with such effect that my friend turned and fled, even though she had been forewarned. Fear is quite irresistibly awakened by the strange quality of the sound given forth by these animals. Having very slight means of defending themselves, I imagine this roaring power has been bestowed upon them to enable them to scare their foes, and drive away through fear such enemies as their soft hands could never overcome in fair fight.

After keeping these lemurs about a year, I found that by no amount of kindness or coaxing could I get them to be really friendly, and I feared they were not over happy without companions of their own kind. They were doubtless caught too old to be tamed. It was therefore deemed best to present them to the Zoo, where under the kind and skilful treatment they receive, they are, I believe, in splendid health and spirits.

Visitors to the monkey-house can identify them from the description I have here given, and cannot fail to admire the agile movements and furry beauty of my quondam pets.

\* My pet mongoose.