

---

WALLACE, ALFRED RUSSEL: *Palm Trees of the Amazon, and their uses*. With 48 plates. Small 8vo. London: Van Voorst. 1853.

He must be a bold man who would undertake a work on Palms after the splendid and scientific volumes of the illustrious Von Martius. The present however is of a very humble character, undertaken by one who was, during his travels on the Amazon and its tributaries, from 1848-1852, "principally occupied with the varied and interesting animal productions of the country." The Palms (and no wonder) soon attracted his attention, as the most striking and characteristic feature of the tropical forests. "In this little work," the author tells us, "careful engravings from my original drawings are given, with a general description of each species, and a history, from personal observation, of the various uses to which it is applied, and of any other interesting particulars connected with it. For the determination of the genera and species, and for that part of the Introduction relating to the botanical characters and geographical distribution of Palms" (and assuredly for the map of America, showing the distribution of Palms) "I am indebted to the magnificent work of Dr. Martius." The chief merit of the work will be found to consist in the "accurate sketches" of the trees themselves, and in the accounts of the uses of certain of these; and if the former are as faithful as Mr. Fitch's lithographs are clever (though very slight), we are thankful for such a series of plates. But we do not see how, with apparently no knowledge of these Palms except from their external forms (often without flower or fruit), an author could refer many of them to species characterized by Martius, or how he could ascertain that his species, so called, are really "new;" for any study or sketches of flowers or fruit seem to be entirely neglected, and the only figures given of them (and most prettily and faithfully executed by Mr. Fitch) are confined to the latter (fruits), some dozen

of kinds copied from specimens in the Museum of the Royal Gardens of Kew: and these occupy two plates apart from the species to which they belong. Fifty "species" are here noticed; and of these, fifteen are considered new. Among them is the "*Piassaba*, or Chíquichíqui of Venezuela" (*Leopoldinia Piassaba* of Mr. Wallace, Plate vi.), and not the *Attalea funifera*, as we had been led to believe, after much inquiry, as we have stated in the Journal of Botany for 1849 (vol. i. p. 121. t. 4), although that is the "Piaçaba" of southern Brazil, where its fibre appears to be employed for similar purposes. We do not in the least call in question the accuracy of Mr. Wallace's statement that his is the tree which now furnishes, on so large a scale, the brooms and brushes of modern days; nor are we able to deny its being a Palm hitherto unknown to Botanists; but we do complain that a Naturalist who is able "to make out its geographical range so exactly, from having resided more than two years among people whose principal occupation consisted in obtaining the fibrous covering of this tree, and from whom no locality of it can have remained undiscovered," should never have been at the pains to procure flowers and fruit for the illustration of so interesting a plant. The fruit too is said to be esculent, and employed to form a thick drink, by washing off the outer coat of the pulp; and the leaves form an excellent thatch, and are almost universally used in that portion of Venezuela on the upper Rio Negro. From that district several hundred tons of the fibre are cut annually and sent to Pará, from which place scarcely a vessel sails for England without its forming a part of her cargo. We trust Mr. Spruce, now in that country, will make up for this deficiency. Of the genus *Cocos*, Mr. Wallace tells us that few species of the genus are found in the Amazon district: yet he has taken no notice of them, but, instead, has given a plate of the *Cocos nucifera*, which is "not a native of South America, but cultivated there."

The work is certainly more suited to a drawing-room table than to the library of the botanist.

---