

From The Pall Mall Gazette.

“THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO.” *

SOME years have elapsed since Mr. Wallace returned from his travels, but the countries which he visited are so little known to Europeans, and lie so much out of the track of even the most enterprising tourists, and further they are so little subject to social changes, that what was true about them fifteen years ago is true now, and is also new to the majority of readers. Yet the Malayan Archipelago is no insignificant portion of the globe, either in respect of its size or of the number and character of its inhabitants. It extends for upwards of 4,000 miles in length from east to west, and 1,300 miles in breadth from north to south. One island of the group, Borneo, is half as large again as all the British isles put together; another, New Guinea, is still larger. Sumatra is about as large as Great Britain; Java and Ireland are of about equal dimensions, and the number of smaller islands, varying in size from that of Jamaica to that of the Isle of Wight, is almost innumerable. A great volcanic belt traverses the Archipelago in a curving line, passing through the length of Sumatra and Java—in Java alone there are forty-five volcanoes—bending to the north at the extremity of the island of Timor, and continuing to the northern extremity of the Philippine Islands. In the very centre of this curve is Borneo, quite free from volcanoes and earthquakes, and Celebes, similarly favoured, except just at its northernmost point. The great island of New Guinea is equally undisturbed by volcanic action, which, however, reappears in New Britain, to the north-east of New Guinea, and continues to the eastern limit of the Archipelago. The climate, for the most part, is moist and damp, in the west of Java rain falling nearly all the year round, and the vegetation is luxuriant, the forests extending from the mountain summits to the level of the sea. Two distinct races inhabit the Archipelago, the Malays and the Papuans. The former occupy Borneo, Sumatra, Java and other western islands; the latter are found in New Guinea and the isles

* “The Malay Archipelago: the Land of the Orang-Utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Men and Nature.” By Alfred Russel Wallace. (London: Macmillan and Co. 1869.)

adjacent. They are strongly contrasted in appearance and manners. The Malays are of a light brown colour; the Papuans are nearly as black as negroes; the Malays are of small stature, beardless, flat-nosed, high-cheeked; the Papuans are tall, with long and prominent noses, and thick beards. The Malays are reserved and undemonstrative, men of few words, not given to altercation, punctilious in the observance of forms, and easily submitting to rule; the Papuans are highly excitable, boisterous in manner, free of speech and gesture, and impatient of all restraint. Finally, the Malays, despite the bad reputation they have acquired, treat strangers with civility and hospitality, while the Papuans, in New Guinea at any rate, massacre any chance visitor without ceremony. After all that one has heard of the treachery and bloodthirstiness of the Malays, it is not a little surprising to find that Mr. Wallace is able, after a lengthened experience, to give them a very different character. He went, almost unattended, from island to island; he lived for months among their savage inhabitants, his life in their hands and at their disposal; and he felt, on the whole, rather more secure than in the streets of London. Indeed, if we do not misinterpret his concluding reflections, he would draw a comparison between the morals of an Englishman and a Malay not very flattering to the former. From the characteristics of the Malay and Papuan races their future destinies may be augured. The Malays accept foreign domination, and thrive and multiply under it. The island of Java, favoured by every gift of nature, is also the scene of one of the greatest triumphs of colonization. The population increased between 1826 and 1850 from 5,500,000 to 9,500,000, and in 1865 amounted to more than 14,000,000, showing an increase of 50 per cent. in fifteen years. The average number of inhabitants to the square mile in 1865 was 368, or “just double that of the populous and fertile Bengal Presidency as given in Thornton’s ‘Gazetteer of India,’ and fully one-third more than that of Great Britain and Ireland at the last census.” On the other hand the Papuan race, superior physically to the Malay, seems doomed to extinction from an unwillingness to harmonize with any foreign element. The great island of New Guinea is practically closed to foreigners by the merciless and ineradicable hostility of the natives, and when the necessities of the world require its colonization, every inch of ground will be contested and defended to the uttermost. The Malay, content to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, may survive; but

the warlike Papuan, "who will not submit to national slavery or to domestic servitude, must disappear before the white man as surely as do the wolf and the tiger."

But we must not forget that ethnology was not the main object of Mr. Wallace's travels. The Malay Archipelago is not only comparatively new ground to a traveller, but is also an extraordinary field for the naturalist, more especially for the entomologist. Mr. Wallace is an enthusiastic entomologist—without enthusiasm no one would bring himself to handle insects of grotesque and repulsive appearance, and of unpleasant powers of biting and stinging. But when a man can sincerely congratulate himself on the discovery of a "superb bug" in his sleeping apartment, his enthusiasm can no longer be called in question. And as is often the case when people have no fear, every creeping thing seemed to know and respect Mr. Wallace. Enormous spiders, with great hairy bodies, lurked in the folds of his bed curtains and stared at him; centipedes sheltered themselves under his pillow; millipedes, more attentive still, would get into his hair; playful scorpions, with tails lifted up on high, used to pop out of his boxes and from under his boards, and gambol round him like a body guard; yet after living twelve years in the tropics, he was never once bitten or stung. Only the irrepressible ants gave him moments of trouble and annoyance. Out of six kinds of ants of unwearied industry and insatiable appetite five will devour everything not isolated by water, and the sixth can swim. As soon as Mr. Wallace arrived at a house his friends the ants arrived also. At Dorey, in New Guinea, they visited him in large numbers, built a nest over his head, and constructed numerous tunnels down every post in order to facilitate more intimate communications. They carried off the insects he was preparing from under his nose, they tore them off the cards on which he had gummed them, and devoured them, insects first and cards afterwards. They swarmed over his hands and face and his body, and when he put up his work and went to bed they went to bed with him. Yet, says Mr. Wallace, placidly, these were by no means a voracious kind of ants. They were rather ascetic in their nature: but then, good heavens! what must a really voracious ant be? Some idea of the multiplicity of insect life in these regions may be gathered from the fact that in one order alone, the Longicorn beetles, Mr. Wallace collected specimens of a thousand species, of which nine hundred were previously undescribed, and new to European cabinets. On a space

of cleared forest in Borneo covering only a single square mile, he collected in a few months 2,000 distinct kinds of beetles, and on twenty-six consecutive nights he caught 1,386 moths, about two-thirds of which were distinct species. Butterflies also abounded, but the more brilliant kinds were not everyday prizes, and so great was Mr. Wallace's excitement on first securing a specimen of the ornithoptera or birdwinged butterfly, whose gorgeous colouring of velvety black and fiery orange is of unique beauty, that on taking it out of his net and opening its glorious wings, his heart began to beat violently, the blood rushed to his head, and, he says, "I felt much more like fainting than I have done when in apprehension of sudden death." And similar sensations affected him at a later period of his travels, on capturing a specimen of the "ornithoptera poseidon," with wings seven inches across, of glossy black and brilliant green, a golden body, and a crimson breast.

The title-page reminds us that Mr. Wallace gives special prominence to his experiences with the orang utan and the bird of paradise. The great man-like ape (*Simia Satyrus*) is found only in certain districts of Borneo and Sumatra. It is an animal of prodigious strength, but perfectly harmless except when attacked. It lives almost entirely on fruits, and does not avoid the presence of man. It was desirable, perhaps, to secure a few specimens, otherwise Mr. Wallace, whose instincts are scientific rather than sportsmanlike, would have been glad to have been saved from inflicting unnecessary torture on so inoffensive an animal. The mias, as the natives call the orang utan, is exceedingly tenacious of life, and Mr. Wallace is evidently not a first-class shot; consequently we read, with no satisfaction but rather with disgust, of one which remained alive and struggled to retain his position on a sheltered branch after both legs were broken, one hip joint and the root of the spine were completely shattered, and two bullets were flattened in his neck and jaws; and of another which "began climbing a tree with considerable facility, after a bullet had entered the lower part of the abdomen and completely traversed the body, fracturing the first cervical vertebra," and remaining flattened in his tongue. We are glad to get over these scenes of bungling butchery, and come to Mr. Wallace's humane attempt to educate a young mias. This little thing lived for three months in his possession, and appears to have required much the same attentions as an infant. When handled or nursed it would be quiet, but when laid down by itself it would begin

to cry like a child. Mr. Wallace made a cradle for it, and washed it morning and night, and dried it with a towel, and combed and brushed its hair, all these operations giving it exceeding pleasure. He likewise fed it with a spoon, and if the food was not quite to its liking it would get into a tremendous passion; but if it was approved of, it would lick its lips and exhibit its satisfaction by the most singular grimaces. “When left dirty, or hungry, or otherwise neglected it would scream violently till attended to. If no one was in the house, or its cries were not attended to, it would be quiet after a little while, but the moment it heard a foot-step would begin again harder than ever.” Want of its natural food and the unaccustomed confinement soon caused the little creature to pine away, and thus Mr. Wallace was prevented from completing its education. Of the eighteen species of birds of paradise at present described, one of which was discovered by Mr. Wallace himself, fourteen are known to inhabit New Guinea, and only a few of these have been seen alive by Europeans. The skins are prepared by the natives in the interior and sent to the coast, but at present it is impossible to penetrate into the regions which these exquisite birds inhabit. Five separate voyages did Mr. Wallace undertake, each occupying the greater part of a year in its execution, in search of birds of paradise; yet in all that time he was only able to obtain specimens of five out of the fourteen species belonging to the New Guinea district. Readers have only to look at his glowing accounts to understand his ardent desire to obtain specimens of these wonderful birds, “whose exquisite beauty of form and colour and strange developments of plumage are calculated to excite the wonder and admiration of the most civilized and the most intellectual of mankind, and to furnish inexhaustible materials for study to the naturalist and for speculation to the philosopher.” But one can scarcely help smiling at Mr. Wallace’s plaintive regrets that such lovely creatures should live and die in dark gloomy forests, unknown and unseen, “with no intelligent eye to gaze upon their loveliness; to all appearance a wanton waste of beauty.” If the bird of paradise could understand the bearings of the case he might take a different view of the question. If he could know that after the intelligent eye had gazed on his loveliness sufficiently, the intelligent hand would be forthwith raised to take his life, and that the penalty for being too beautiful would be certain death, he would probably prefer to remain in his pres-

ent obscurity, and live out the length of days allotted to him by nature. But, apart from the birds of paradise, Mr. Wallace’s journeys must have been successful enough to satisfy his most sanguine expectations. Nor does he appear to have experienced much hardship or privation. Almost everywhere he went he was well received, and he cruised about from island to island, sometimes in a native prau, with an immunity from danger remarkable in those pirate-haunted waters. Occasionally he got a lift in a Dutch steamer, and if the dietary scale is as liberal on all of them as on that which conveyed him from Macassar to Banda and Amboyna, they must be desirable conveyances for tourists of large appetite. At 6 a. m. cups of tea and coffee were served. From seven to eight there was a light breakfast of tea, eggs, sardines, &c. The “*et cetera*” is suggestive. At ten, Madeira gin and bitters were served as a whet for the substantial eleven o’clock breakfast, which differed only from dinner in the absence of soup—a distinction, in fact, without a difference. At three p. m. more tea and coffee; at five, bitters, “*et cetera*”; at half-past six, a good dinner with beer and claret; at eight more tea and coffee. “Between whiles beer and soda-water are supplied when called for, so there is no lack of little gastronomic excitements to while away the tedium of a sea voyage.” Mr. Wallace is accurate in his remark that these arrangements “are somewhat different from those on board English steamers.” Moreover the Dutch seem to have communicated to the native populations under their control a knowledge of the truth that if a man does not eat neither can he work. Mr. Wallace was entertained in Celebes by a native chief whose father wore nothing but a strip of bark, and lived in a hut raised on poles and decorated with human heads. “The dinner was excellent. Fowls cooked in various ways; wild pig roasted, stewed, and fried; a fricassee of bats; potatoes, rice, and other vegetables; all served on good china, with finger glasses and fine napkins, and abundance of good claret and beer, seemed to me rather curious at the table of a native chief on the mountains of Celebes.” But, in truth, throughout his wanderings, Mr. Wallace seems to have had something more than average good luck, and, as far as we can judge, he deserved it by exhibiting a regard for the prejudices and peculiarities of those among whom he sojourned that won their confidence and their co-operation. He has compressed into two moderately

sized volumes the record of the events and discoveries of twelve years, and we can truly say that there is not a word wasted. Indeed, if anything, there is too little description of scenery; and, considering that the Malayan islands have not yet been "done" by professional bookmakers, we would have welcomed more extended details on this head. It is, of course, the duty of a reviewer to find fault somewhere, so we will complain of Mr. Wallace's dislike to the useful and unoffending comma, and will assure him that the eye is distressed with such sentences as that about the "strength lightness smoothness straightness roundness and hollowness" of the bamboo. But in exchange we will thank him for having made his most interesting and most valuable volumes additionally useful to readers by the insertion of those often-omitted items, good maps and good indices.
