

From The Spectator.

WALLACE'S AMAZON AND RIO NEGRO.*

EXCEPT a fire at sea on his homeward voyage, with the consequent loss of his collection, there is not much incident in the travels of Mr. Wallace, nor anything in the shape of large discovery. His explorations on the Amazon and Rio Negro, the Northern branch of that mighty river, form, however, an enchainning work. In the novelty of its scenery and manners, in the truthful, albeit somewhat literal picture of what the traveller saw and felt, in the quiet earnestness by which obstacles were surmounted by Talleyrand's favorite rule of waiting, and in the patience with which sickness, suffering, and privation were submitted to, the *Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro* remind us of the simplicity of the old voyagers. Cramped in a canoe by day, sleeping by night in a hammock slung upon a tree, or in a half-open shed, with gruel and coffee for diet, save when the line or the gun provided a meal, were at best the accommodations on a river voyage. In the upper part of the streams, rocks, rapids, and falls, intervened to impose severe labor and no small risk. On shore, matters were often not much better. Except at Para, the capital of the region, and a few towns on the banks of the main streams, house-building is an art

* A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro; with an Account of the Native Tribes, and Observations on the Climate, Geology, and Natural History of the Amazon Valley. By Alfred R. Wallace. With a Map and Illustrations. Published by Reeve & Co.

very little advanced: in some places, indeed, they do not trouble themselves to level the floor. A little industry would enable the country to produce almost everything, yet little can be got which does not grow spontaneously. Bad beef in the larger towns is the only article of meat; fish in the smaller places can mostly be had for catching, and fowls sometimes. The bulk of the inhabitants live upon rice or preparations of the arrow-root family and fruits, washed down by a kind of rum, when they can get it. Coffee and sugar, though growing spontaneously, have to be imported from other parts of Brazil; the lamentable results of — to speak plainly — laziness. This was the state of Barra, a sort of emporium, and a principal city.

The city of Barra, the capital of the province and the residence of the President, was now in a very miserable condition. No vessel had arrived from Para for five months, and all supplies were exhausted. Flour had been long since finished, consequently there was no bread; neither was there biscuit, butter, sugar, cheese, wine, nor vinegar; molasses even, to sweeten our coffee, was very scarce; and the spirit of the country (cachaça) was so nearly exhausted that it could only be obtained at retail and in the smallest quantities: everybody was reduced to farina and fish, with beef twice a week and turtle about as often.

This laziness, which is strong enough in the pure Portuguese blood and half-breeds, is carried to an awful pitch in the Indians. Scarcely any offers of payment will induce them to work regularly or when you want them. Week after week and sometimes for a month, was Mr. Wallace kept at a spot for want of

boatmen: even when they had engaged themselves and received their pay, (it is the custom of the country to pay beforehand, or more truly to go upon a universal system of tick), they would take themselves off. Besides these social evils, there is an Egyptian plague of something worse than flies—mosquitoes, ants, and other insects, give the unlucky traveller little respite, and sometimes seriously injure him if their bites are neglected. With good food and proper precautions, the climate appears to be healthy, though under the Equator; the exposure and privations of Mr. Wallace at last brought on dysentery, fever, and ague. But when able to quit his hammock, he still struggled on in search of insects, birds, beasts, fishes, and reptiles. This is an example of the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties at San Jeronymo.

Here we were tolerably free from chegoes, but had another plague, far worse, because more continual. We had suffered more or less from piums in all parts of the river, but here they were in such countless myriads as to render it almost impossible to sit down during the day. It was most extraordinary that previously to this year they had never been known in the river. Senhor L. and the Indians all agreed that a pium had hitherto been a rarity, and now they were as plentiful as in their very worst haunts. Having long discarded the use of stockings in these "altitudes," and not anticipating any such pest, I did not bring a pair, which would have been useful to defend my feet and ankles in the house, as the pium, unlike the mosquito, does not penetrate any covering, however thin.

As it was, the torments I suffered when skinning a bird or drawing a fish can scarcely be imagined by the unexperienced. My feet were so thickly covered with the little blood-spots produced by their bites, as to be of a dark purplish red color, and much swelled and inflamed. My hands suffered similarly, but in a less degree, being more constantly in motion. The only means of taking a little rest in the day, was by wrapping up hands and feet in a blanket. The Indians close their houses, as these insects do not bite in the dark; but ours having no door, we could not resort to this expedient.

The motive of our author's enterprise was in part to see the splendor of Tropical scenery, and to luxuriate in the teeming nature of Tropical life both animal and vegetable. He was disappointed. In the immediate neighborhood of Para, the grand and distinctive features of Tropical scenery had been removed, and the same result would doubtless follow in any case of extended settlement. The vegetation he did see at Para was not so striking as he expected; and the scenery, as we infer, straggling, ragged, and unkept—like an English landscape abutting on a low and dirty suburb. In the forest it-

self the position of the Scotch Sheriff was reversed, and you often could not see the trees for the wood. Tropical vegetation opposes itself to examination. You have to cut a path before you can make your way. Even when there happens to be a track, the view is bounded; though many specimens, especially of the parasite order—gigantic creepers clinging to gigantic trees—were wonderfully impressive. Then, animated nature was not so rife as Mr. Wallace had expected. The creatures were there, but, except insects and reptiles you had rather avoid, they were not in great numbers, and could not be got sight of without searching their haunts, and not always then. In fact, Mr. Wallace did not allow for descriptive art. He thought that all the traveller sees was to be seen at once; taking the descriptions for "studies from nature," instead of "compositions." The practical drawback of personal discomfort from many causes that beset the explorer of a Tropical forest beyond what the reader experiences in his chair, might have something to do with the disappointment. His own descriptions of primeval nature have a similar effect to those of other writers, though he does not disguise the concomitant inconveniences.

The Maranon or Amazon, the mightiest river in the world, has its sources in roots of the Eastern face of the Andes. Its main stream is of course increased by very numerous tributaries; among which, the Rio Negro, rising near the head-waters of the Oronoco, and it is said communicating with that river, is by far the most considerable, and may in fact be considered a second branch. It was up the Rio Negro from its junction with the Amazon to the regions lying between its sources and those of the Oronoco, as well as a tributary of the Negro called Uaupes, that the real explorations of Mr. Wallace were made. He did not journey far up the Solimoes or Upper Amazon; and the main stream of the Amazon, or the country in the neighborhood of Para, though fresh, have not the novelty of the almost primæval streams and forests of the Rio Negro.

Wonders of natural history may be considered a main subject of the book under notice, especially in the vegetable world. Once beyond the environs of Para, gigantic vegetation or extraordinary production is continually encountered. The milk tree was one of the first wonders Mr. Wallace saw, at the mills of a Canadian gentleman not far from Para.

What most interested us, however, were several large logs of the masseranduba, or milk-tree. On our way through the forest we had seen some trunks much notched by persons who had been extracting the milk. It is one of the noblest

trees of the forest, rising with a straight stem to an enormous height. The timber is very hard, fine-grained, and durable, and is valuable for works which are much exposed to the weather. The fruit is eatable and very good, the size of a small apple, and full of a rich and very juicy pulp. But strangest of all is the vegetable milk, which exudes in abundance when the bark is cut: it has about the consistence of thick cream, and but for a very slight peculiar taste could scarcely be distinguished from the genuine product of the cow. Mr. Leavens ordered a man to tap some logs that had lain nearly a month in the yard. He cut several notches in the bark with an axe, and in a minute the rich sap was running out in great quantities. It was collected in a basin, diluted with water, strained, and brought up at tea time, and at breakfast next morning. The peculiar flavor of the milk seemed rather to improve the quality of the tea, and gave it as good a color as rich cream; in coffee it is equally good. Mr. Leavens informed us that he had made a custard of it, and that, though it had a curious dark color, it was very well tasted. The milk is also used for glue, and is said to be as durable as that made use of by carpenters. As a specimen of its capabilities in this line, Mr. Leavens showed us a violin he had made, the belly-board of which, formed of two pieces he had glued together with it, applied fresh from the tree without any preparation. It had been done two years; the instrument had been in constant use, and the joint was now perfectly good and sound throughout its whole length. As the milk hardens by exposure to air it becomes a very tough, slightly elastic substance, much resembling gutta-percha; but not having the property of being softened by hot water, it is not likely to become so extensively useful as that article.

A large part of the country lying between the junction of the Solimoes or Upper Amazon and the Rio Negro is flat and marshy at all times. During the rainy season, it affords the singular aspect of an inland sea.

The river was now so high that a great portion of the lowlands between the Rio Negro and the Amazon was flooded, being what is called "Gapó." This is one of the most singular features of the Amazon. It extends from a little above Santarem up to the confines of Peru—a distance of about seventeen hundred miles, and varies in width on each side of the river from one to ten or twenty miles. From Santarem to Coari, a little town on the Solimoes, a person may go by canoe in the wet season without once entering into the main river. He will pass through small streams, lakes and swamps, and everywhere around him will stretch out an illimitable waste of waters, but all covered with a lofty virgin forest. For days he will travel through this forest, scraping against tree-trunks, and stooping to pass beneath the leaves of prickly palms, now level with the water, though raised on stems forty feet high. In this trackless maze the Indian finds his way with unerring certainty, and by slight indications of broken twigs or scraped

bark, goes on day by day as if travelling on a beaten road. In the Gapó peculiar animals are found, attracted by the fruits of trees which grow only there. In fact, the Indians assert that every tree that grows in the Gapó is distinct from all those found in other districts; and when we consider the extraordinary conditions under which these plants exist, being submerged for six months of the year till they are sufficiently lofty to rise above the highest water-level, it does not seem improbable that such may be the case. Many species of trogons are peculiar to the Gapó, others to the dry virgin forest. The umbrella chatterer is entirely confined to it, as is also the little bristle-tailed manakin. Some monkeys are found there only in the wet season; and whole tribes of Indians, such as the Purupús and Múrus, entirely inhabit it, building small, easily-removable huts on the sandy shores in the dry season, and on rafts in the wet; spending a great part of their lives in canoes, sleeping suspended in rude hammocks from trees over the deep water; cultivating no vegetables, but subsisting entirely on the fish, turtle, and cow-fish, which they obtain from the river.

On crossing the Rio Negro from the city of Barra, we entered into a tract of this description. Our canoe was forced under branches and among dense bushes, till we got into a part where the trees were loftier and a deep gloom prevailed. Here the lowest branches of the trees were level with the surface of the water, and were many of them putting forth flowers. As we proceeded, we sometimes came to a grove of small palms, the leaves being now only a few feet above us; and among them was the marajá, bearing bunches of agreeable fruit, which as we passed the Indians cut off with their long knives. Sometimes the rustling of leaves overhead told us that monkeys were near, and we would soon perhaps discover them peeping down from among the thick foliage, and then bounding rapidly away as soon as we had caught a glimpse of them. Presently we came out into the sunshine, in a grassy lake filled with lilies and beautiful water plants, little yellow bladderworts (*Utricularius*), and the bright blue flowers and curious leaves with swollen stalks of the *Pontederias*. Again in the gloom of the forest, among the lofty cylindrical trunks rising like columns out of the deep water: now a splashing of falling fruit around us would announce that birds were feeding overhead, and we could discover a flock of paroquets, or some bright-blue chatterers, or the lovely pompadour, with its delicate white wings and claret-colored plumage; now with a whirr a trogan would seize a fruit on the wing, or some clumsy toucan make the branches shake as he alighted."

Numerous other passages might be quoted, descriptive of vegetable or animal life, or operations of nature on a gigantic scale, in those vast and scarcely inhabited regions. After all, the greatest interest attaches to man; and he may be seen there in every aspect, from pure nature to a degenerated civilization. It may also be seen how truly

well-directed labor is the source of wealth; for with a teeming soil, and plenty of it, the Portuguese live as we have seen at Barra; and this is the mode of life at one of the Indian hamlets in its vicinity.

An Indian living near now arrived, and we accompanied him to his house where I was to find a lodging. It was about half a mile further up the river, at the mouth of a small stream, where there was a little settlement of two or three families. The part which it was proposed I should occupy was a small room with a very steep hill for a floor, and three doorways, two with palm-leaf mats, and the other doing duty as a window. No choice being offered me, I at once accepted the use of this apartment, and my men having now brought on my canoe, I ordered my boxes on shore, hung up my hammock, and at once took possession. The Indians then left me; but a boy lent me by Senhor Henrique remained with me to light a fire and boil my coffee, and prepare dinner when we were so fortunate as to get any. I borrowed a table to work at; but, owing to the great inclination of the ground, nothing that had not a very broad base would stay upon it. The houses here were imbedded in the forest, so that although there were four or five not twenty yards apart, they were not visible from each other, the space where the forest had been cut down being planted in the fruit-trees.

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* There were two other rooms in the house where I lived, inhabited by three families. The men generally wore nothing but a pair of trousers, the women only a petticoat, and the children nothing at all. They all lived in the poorest manner, and at first I was quite puzzled to find out when they had their meals. In the morning early they would each have a *cuya* of *mingan* (a gruel); then about mid-day they would eat some dry farina cake or a roasted yam; and in the evening some more *mingau* or farina or *pacovas*. I could not imagine that they really had nothing else to eat, but at last was obliged to come to the conclusion that various preparations of mandioca and water formed their only food. About once a week they would get a few small fish or a bird; but then it would be divided among so many as only to serve as a relish to the cassava bread. My hunter never took anything out with him but a bag of dry farina; and after being away fourteen hours in his canoe would come home and sit down in his hammock, and converse as if his thoughts were far from eating; and then when a *cuya* of *mingau* was offered him, would quite contentedly drink it, and be ready to start off before daybreak the next morning. Yet he was as stout and jolly-looking as John Bull himself, fed daily on fat beef and mutton.

Portuguese colonists, widely scattered over an illimitable territory, removed from the control of a public opinion, mixing with Indians, and latterly excited by revolutions, were not likely to be distinguished by a severe morality. Senhor Joao Antonio de Lima, a

"merchant" who gave a pretty long lift to Mr. Wallace on the Rio Negro, was a pleasant, friendly person, and apparently "respectable" after the manner of his country, though by no means correct in his domestic relations.

Going up to the house, I was introduced to Senhor L.'s family; which consisted of two old grown-up daughters, two young ones, and a little boy of eight years old. A good-looking "mameluca," or half-breed woman, of about thirty was introduced as the "mother of his younger children." Senhor L. had informed me during the voyage that he did not patronize marriage, and thought everybody a great fool who did. He had illustrated the advantages of keeping oneself free of such ties by informing me that the mother of his two elder daughters having grown old, and being unable to bring them up properly or teach them Portuguese, he had turned her out of doors, and got a younger and more civilized person in her place. The poor woman had since died of jealousy, or "passion," as he termed it. When young, she had nursed him during an eighteen months' illness and saved his life: but he seemed to think he had performed a duty in turning her away, — for, said he, "She was an Indian, and could only speak her own language; and so long as she was with them my children would never learn Portuguese."

"The whole family welcomed him in a very cold and timid manner, coming up and asking his blessing as if they had parted from him the evening before, instead of three months since. We then had some coffee and breakfast; after which the canoe was unloaded, and a little house just opposite his, which happened to be unoccupied, was swept out for me. My boxes were placed in it, my hammock hung up, and I soon made myself comfortable in my new quarters, and then walked out to look about me.

The state of the flock cannot much be wondered at when we see the character of the shepherd.

"At length, however, the Padre, Frei José arrived with Senhor Tenent Filisberto, the Comandante of Marabitanas. Frei José dos Santos Innocentos was a tall, thin, prematurely old man, thoroughly worn out by every kind of debauchery, his hands crippled, and his body ulcerated; yet he still delighted in recounting the feats of his youth, and was celebrated as the most original and amusing story-teller in the province of Pará. He was carried up the hill, from the river-side in a hammock; and took a couple of days to rest before he commenced his ecclesiastical operations. I often went with Senhor L. to visit him, and was always much amused with his inexhaustible fund of anecdotes: he seemed to know everybody and everything in the province, and had always something humorous to tell about them. His stories were most of them disgustingly coarse; but so cleverly told, in such quaint and expressive language, and with such amusing imitations of voice and

manner, that they were irresistibly ludicrous. There is always, too, a particular charm in hearing good anecdotes in a foreign language. The point is the more interesting from the obscure method of arriving at it; and the knowledge you acquire of the various modes of using the peculiar idioms of the language causes a pleasure quite distinct from that of the story itself. Frei Jozé never repeated a story twice in the week he was with us; and Senhor L. who, has known him for years, says he had never before heard many of the anecdotes he now related. He had been a soldier, then a friar in a convent, and afterwards a parish priest: he told tales of his convent life just like what we read in Chaucer of their doings in his time. Don Juan was an innocent compared with Frei Jozé; but he told us he had a great respect for his cloth,

and never did anything disreputable — *during the day!*

So far connected with this volume, as being the result of the travels it recounts, is a little book by Mr. Wallace, published by Mr. Van Voorst. Its subject is the *Palm-Trees of the Amazon*;* forty-eight of which are exhibited in clear and lively sketches, accompanied by descriptive letterpress. It is essentially a botanical book, but contains some incidental pictures of the scenes among which the palms are found, as well as of the palms, and the people to whom they are all in all.

* *Palm-Trees of the Amazon and their Uses.* By Alfred Russel Wallace. With forty-eight Plates. Published by Van Voorst.
