LONDON, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1853.

REVIEWS.

A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro. By Alfred R. Wallace.

Reverence to travel well and easily is a gift given to few, abundant though travellers be. Out of the crowd of voyagers who narrate their journeys, many are highly qualified to give any intelligible account of what they have seen. Each region requires a different kind of person for its exploration: for one, a scholar and antiquarian; for another, a second-rate botanist of manners; for a third, an artist; for a fourth, a naturalist. Very rarely do we find several of these qualities combined, though, for the great and true traveller, all are more or less requisite. Above everything it is to be desired that the man who undertakes to describe a country, new or old, with its people, productions, and scenery, should understand himself, and know well wherein his own weak points, as well as the strong ones, lie.

For one, a scholar and antiquarian; for another, a debased form of history and scholarship are there of little avail; man and nature exhibit her charms to the best advantage in the wonderful variety and ever-interesting shapes. The man who is neither zoologist nor botanist will pass days travelling up the rivers, with the opportunity of killing it by a blow on the head with a stone, must be considered as one of the most learned and of particular friends on Sundays and afternoons—whose tail and tongue are as attractive as the only means of furnishing through his one and flowering rush; for I cannot consider the nor is it so abundant an ornament of the tropical water, which, in the forest, only grow far up on the topmost branches. Bright flowers and green foliage combine their charms, and climbers with their flowering festoons cover over the bare and decaying stems. Yet, pick out the loveliest spots, where the most gorgeous flowers of the tropics expand their glowing petals, and for every scene of this kind, we may find another at home of equal beauty, and with an equal amount of brilliant colour.

"Look at a field of buttercups and daisies,—a hill-side covered with gorse and brome,—a mountain rich with purple heather,—or a forest-glade, azure with a carpet of wild hyacinths, and they will show you more wonderful combinations and spiritual glories than can produce. I have never seen anything more glorious than an old crab-tree in full blossom; and the horse-chesnut, lilla, and laburnum, will vie with the Victoria regia plant of the Amazon.

In the tropical waters are no more beautiful plants than our white and yellow water-lilies, our irises, and flowering rush; for I cannot consider the flower of the Victoria regia more beautiful than the Hippomastix, though it may be larger,

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"If, as we have had occasion to remark, when noticing his volume on the 'Palm Trees of the Amazon,' he is not always minutely accurate in his botanical descriptions, as a describer of the aspects and flowers of a country prolific in organic treasures, he may lay claim to having bestowed the full measure of his attention, and book abounds with well-drawn pen-and-ink pictures of the world of creatures that surrounded him during his wanderings. Moreover, he is not dazzled, as too many before him have been, with the individual splendours of the tropics, but carries in his mind the ever-interesting shapes. The man who is neither zoologist nor botanist will bear a comparison with any scene the tropics can produce.
the story of the Amazons has arisen from these feminine-looking warriors encountered by the early voyager. I am inclined to this opinion, from the effect they first produced on myself, when it was only by close examination I saw that they were men; and, were the front part of their bodies and their breasts covered with shields, such as they always use, I am convinced any person seeing them for the first time would conclude they were women. We have only therefore to suppose that tribes having similar customs to those now existing on the river Uaupes, inhabited the regions where the Amazons were reported to have been seen, and we have a rational explanation of what has so much puzzled all geographers. The only objection to this explanation is, that traditions are said to exist among the natives, of a nation of ‘women without husbands.’ Of this tradition, however, I was myself unable to obtain any trace, and I can easily imagine it entirely to have arisen from the suggestions and inquiries of Europeans themselves. When the story of the Amazons was first made known, it became of course a point with all future travellers to verify it, or if possible get a glimpse of these warlike ladies. The Indians must no doubt have been overwhelmed with questions and suggestions about them, and they, thinking that the white men must know best, would transmit to their descendants and families the idea that such a nation did exist in some distant part of the country. Succeeding travellers, finding traces of this idea among the Indians, would take it as a proof of the existence of the Amazons; instead of being merely the effect of a mistake at the first, which had been unknowingly spread among them by preceding travellers, seeking to obtain some evidence on the subject.”

It is much to be regretted that better examples than the very refuse of white men who surround them should not be placed before the Indian tribes of tropical America. They are evidently people possessed of valuable qualities, quick to learn, and of good natural intellect. Much yet remains to be done in the investigation of their affinities and languages, and the directions in which inquiries should be made are ably indicated in a valuable commentary by our eminent ethnologist and philologist, Dr. Latham, on the vocabularies carefully procured by Mr. Wallace.