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‘LITERATURE.’

*A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro.* By Alfred A. Wallace. London: Reeve and Co.

Mr. Wallace is a more philosophic traveler than Horatio. It is no mere “truant disposition” which lures him from his home. He is devoted to science: natural history is his ailment. He would cross seas, rivers, and mountains in pursuit of a kingfisher, and chase a butterfly from Indus to the Pole, if butterflies could penetrate so far. With him “high mountains are a feeling,” but not so much on their own account as for the sake of the vermin that infest them. Insects, birds and plants are the living manna that would make any wilderness a garden to him. An earnest desire to visit a tropical country, to behold the luxuriance of animal and vegetable life said to exist there, and to see with his own eyes all those wonders which it is so pleasant to read of in these Northern latitudes, were the motives that induced him to break through the trammels of business and the ties of home, and start for “some far land where endless summer reigns.” A perusal of Mr. Edward’s interesting little book, “A Voyage up the Amazon,” appears to have determined the direction of his wanderings, and he decided upon going there, both on account of its easiness of access, and the little that was known of it compared with most other parts of South America. He proposed to pay his expenses by making collections in natural history, and notwithstanding that he met some sad reverses, and lost no end of parrots and monkeys on his way home, he appears to have achieved this desirable object. He encountered perils by sea and perils by land, and suffered privations such as exceed the endurance, and almost the credence, of philosophers who live at home at ease; but enthusiasm is the true Styx in which, if a man be immersed, he becomes a thousand times more invulnerable than the son of Peleus. What is the yellow fever to a man who has the prospect of adding a boa constrictor to his verandah?—what is the ague to a man who, like Demiphon of old, would shiver in the sunshine if he lost his blue macaw?—or what a shipwreck to a man who has the chance of swimming to a country where he is likely to make the acquaintance of a ringtailed baboon? All these vicissitudes Mr. Wallace experienced; but he endured them all with the spirit of a martyr, and he means to face them all again. When on land the yellow fever marked him for her own, and the ague tracked him like a wolf, and when at sea his ship—the brig Helen, from Pará—caught fire, and he had to take the long boat, in which he was knocked about for many days consecutively till at last picked up by Captain Venables, of the *Jordeson*, within 200 miles of Bermuda; but these kind of things are the ordinary staple of his experience, and they fall upon him (to use a homely metaphor) like water on the wild duck’s wing. He means to renew the memory of his adventures, and assures us that the pleasure he has found in the contemplation of the strange and beautiful objects he has met with, and the deep interest arising from the study, in their native wilds, of the varied races of mankind, have been such as to determine his continuing the course he has entered upon, and cause him “to look forward with pleasure to again visiting the wild and luxuriant scenery and the sparkling life of the tropics.” His book is not a mere narrative of his journeys, and of the impressions which they awakened. It contains a graphic and interesting account of the native tribes, and some observations of the greatest practical value on the climate, geology, and natural history of the Amazon Valley. It is written with point, spirit, and power, and combines the attractions of literary style with the benefits of solid information. We have read it with the greatest pleasure, and can with perfect sincerity recommend it to the favour of the public.

The following is one of many droll anecdotes which enliven the scientific character of the work. It amusingly illustrates the credulity of the negroes:—

“There was a negro,” said he, “who had a pretty wife, to whom another negro was rather attentive when he had an opportunity. One day the husband went out to hunt, and the other party thought it a good opportunity to pay a visit to the lady. The husband, however, returned rather unexpectedly, and the visitor climbed up on the rafters to be out of sight among the old boards and baskets that were stowed away there. The husband put his gun by in a corner, and called to his wife to get his supper, and then sat down in his hammock. Casting his eyes up to the rafters, he saw a leg protruding from among the baskets, and, thinking it something supernatural, crossed himself and said, ‘Lord, deliver us from the legs appearing overhead!’ The other, hearing this, attempted to draw up his legs out of sight, but, losing his balance, came down suddenly on the floor in front of the astonished husband, who, half frightened, asked, ‘Where do you come from?’ ‘I have just come from heaven,’ said the other, ‘and have brought you news of your little daughter Maria.’ ‘Oh! wife, wife! come and see a man who has brought us news of our little daughter Maria;’ then, turning to the visitor, continued, ‘And what was my little daughter doing, when you left?’ ‘Oh! she was sitting at the feet of the Virgin, with a golden crown on her head, and smoking a golden pipe a yard long.’ ‘And did she not send any message to us?’ ‘Oh yes, she sent many remembrances, and begged you to send her two pounds of your tobacco from the little rhossa, they have not got any half so good up there.’ ‘Oh! wife, wife! bring two pounds of our tobacco from the little rhossa, for our daughter Maria is in heaven, and she says they have not any half so good up there.’ So the tobacco was brought, and the visitor was departing, when he was asked, ‘Are there many white men up there?’ ‘Very few,’ he replied, ‘they are all down below with the *diablo*.’ ‘I thought so,’ the other replied, apparently quite satisfied, ‘good night!’”

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2017.