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“WHERE WALLACE TROD”: BEING SOME ACCOUNT OF AN ENTOMOLOGICAL TRIP TO MT. SERAMBU, SARAWAK, BORNEO.

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(PLATES V. & VI.)

JUST as the Galapagos Isles will always be famous for the birth of Darwin's great theory of Natural Selection, just as Ternate will always share this fame as the birthplace of the same idea to Wallace, so too, should Sarawak be remembered in connection with Wallace's earlier essay on the Origin of Species,* which foreshadowed that written three years later in Ternate, and read before the Linnean Society in conjunction with Darwin's essay in 1858.

During Wallace's travels in the Malay Archipelago, lasting over eight years, the great naturalist spent fifteen months in Sarawak, nine of which he spent at Simunjan, which he describes as the best collecting-ground for insects found in all his travels, and, as most readers will remember, he gives some astonishing figures to illustrate this. Besides this, he also spent four weeks on a mountain called Serambu, not far from Kuching, the capital of Sarawak; this was from December, 1855, to January, 1856. His essay was written in February, 1855, at Santubong, the Sarawak seaside resort, and was published in September, 1855. As he tells us in his 'Life,' 1905 (p. 354), through many evenings and wet days in solitude he used to "ponder over the problem which was rarely absent from my thoughts," and there is little doubt that the quiet time spent on Peninjau (a spur of Serambu) enabled him to put in many quiet hours of wrestling with the all-absorbing riddle. It was therefore with feelings of the liveliest interest that I first beheld Mt. Serambu, just three

* "On the Law which has Regulated the Introduction of New Species," published in 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History,' September, 1855, and reprinted as Essay I. in 'Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection,' by the same author, 1870.

years ago (February, 1909), and had soon determined to go to that mountain, find the very spot, if possible, where Wallace lived, spend the same months there as Wallace did, and devote myself to catching insects just in the same way that he did. To hopes of thinking out another epoch-making theory I did *not* aspire, but I did hope that my collection of insects would not fall far short of those recorded by him, and in this I was not disappointed. Circumstances prevented me from going to Serambu until January of this year (1912), and it was with the keenest anticipation that I started from Kuching at 3 p.m. on January 19th in the Borneo Company's little steam-launch 'Patricia.' My companions for the trip were Mr. Harrison W. Smith, who was as desirous as I "to step where Wallace trod," two museum collectors (Sea-Dayaks), two Land-Dayaks, and our two Chinese boys. A three hours' journey up-river in the launch brought us to Busau, once a populous place on account of the antimony works. From here we walked some three or four miles to a place called Paku, where we had arranged to spend the night in the Government bungalow. Unfortunately, as the sun set soon after 6 p.m., we soon found ourselves stumbling along a slippery path in the dark, which was made no nicer by a heavy downpour of rain. Our luggage and retinue followed on little trolley-cars, arriving about 10 p.m., after successfully negotiating sundry little differences of opinion between the car and the line, which, while adding character to the line, at the same time serve to distinguish it from our memories of the London to Bath portion of the Great Western Railway.

At Paku the mountain faced us due east, and we learnt that there were two sites of former bungalows, one to the south, where a resident of this district used to spend some days, and the other on the northern end of the mountain on a spur called Peninjau; this was the site of the old bungalow built by the Rajah. The Dayaks who had come down to fetch our baggage explained that nothing was left of either of these bungalows, and that both sites were all overgrown, especially the latter, which they said was indistinguishable now from the old jungle. However, this last was our objective, so off we started that morning, and after an hour and a half of hot walking we came to a Dayak village on the lower slopes of the mountain; here we deposited our baggage, and, taking three men with us, Mr. Smith and I proceeded on up to "explore," or rather to see how far the Dayaks could be believed in their account of the place. Just above the village the path lay over some huge boulders, and these had been bridged by a series of bamboos placed end on; some of these were notched to give a foothold, others were not; to some were attached hand-rails, to others not. Having respectfully and successfully negotiated this portion of the Dayak

highway, we came by a steep but easier path to a deserted village, which, situated as it was on the steep slope of the hill, surrounded by the stately trees characteristic of old jungle, and itself overgrown by a quick-spreading green garment of creeper and undergrowth, made a pretty picture, and my friend was not slow to take the opportunity of photographing it. A few minutes further brought us to the end of our journey—a fine mangosteen tree loaded with some of the most delicious fruit imaginable. Our Dayak guides said this was where the bungalow used to be, and after a little search we discovered the six posts on which the raised floor had rested; between them grew a fine young tree just three feet in circumference at the base, and the whole place was, as the Dayaks had said, just like ordinary jungle. Except for those six posts and two boards used for steps, not a trace of the bungalow was left.*

We returned that afternoon and slept the night at the Dayak house. Next morning we ascended the hill again, this time accompanied by twenty-one Dayaks, who, after carrying up our baggage, spent some hours clearing the site and building us a house. This was built on much grander lines than is usual for these jungle shelters, and for those unacquainted with this style of domicile the following details may be of interest:—Six poles were first driven into the ground, three to mark each end of the house, which then measured 13 ft. × 10 ft. Two feet above the ground poles were tied across these ends, and others laid at right angles to them, supported by more cross poles on forked stakes underneath. Bamboos were then laid close together to form a floor, while the walls were formed of the same useful material split lengthwise, and then more bamboos laid across the top supported our “kadjang” roof.† We were a bit short of these “kadjangs,” but luckily my friend had brought a tarpaulin, so we were able to make our little hut very fairly watertight.

* Wallace’s description of his visit there is given in his ‘Malay Archipelago’ (10th ed. 1902, pp. 63–67). I quote the following lines descriptive of the place:—

“This is a very steep pyramidal mountain of crystalline basaltic rock about a thousand feet high, and covered with luxuriant forest. There are three Dayak villages upon it, and on a little platform near the summit is the rude wooden lodge where the English Rajah was accustomed to go for relaxation and cool fresh air. It is only twenty miles up the river, but the road up the mountain is a succession of ladders on the face of precipices, bamboo bridges over gullies and chasms, and slippery paths over rocks and tree-trunks and huge boulders as big as houses. A cool spring under an overhanging rock just below the cottage furnished us with refreshing baths and delicious drinking water, and the Dayaks brought us daily heaped-up baskets of Mangusteens and Lansats, two of the most delicious of the subacid tropical fruits.”

† “Kadjangs” are palm-leaves sewn together in a large square; they are in continual demand for hut and boat coverings—in fact, anything which wants a temporary protection from the rain; they cost about fourpence each.

Except for the "kadjangs" and tarpaulin which we brought from Kuching, all the materials for the house (which contained no nail or cord) were provided by the jungle.

A little way below the house was a huge overhanging rock, under which trickled a tiny stream; a bamboo split down the middle formed an excellent water-pipe, carrying the water to a place under which we could stand and bathe.

Mindful of Wallace's warnings in the Malay Archipelago, and knowing from my own experience how difficult it is to catch moths in a native-made hut roofed with leaves, I brought some old packing-cases from Kuching, and these were brought up the hill in sections by Dayaks. When put together and given a coat of whitewash they formed a very serviceable moth-trap. The rough measurements of it were: 7 ft. high; across open front, 4 ft.; across back (boarded), 2 ft.; sides, 4 ft.; a good reflector lamp placed on a split bamboo inside this kept us well supplied with moths each night.

According to our aneroids, the height above the sea-level for this place was just under 1000 ft., and the summit of Mt. Serambu was 1340 ft. The temperature in the shade of our hut averaged between 71°-77° Fahr.; on one cold afternoon it went down to 69°, and for two days it never went above 73°. These temperatures were almost suggestive of the North Pole after those registered at Kuching, where 80°-90° is the usual range, with an occasional rise to 96°. As the wet monsoon lasts from October to March, we could hardly expect to have other than a wet spell in January for our trip, and for the last portion, at all events, of our stay there we had our full share of wet weather, which accounts for the relatively small number of insects caught in the daytime, although it made no difference to the numbers captured at night.

On the 21st we spent our first night on the spot where Wallace had dwelt just fifty-six years before. Jungle life has been described so often before that there is no need for me to detail ours, though let me remark that the best accounts give but a very small idea of the unique charm of life in such surroundings. With the exception of a visit paid by Mr. Smith and myself to some caves in a neighbouring hill, our party spent just a fortnight collecting on and round this place. Mr. Smith unfortunately contracted fever, and had to return to Kuching on the 29th. The remainder of us stayed up there until February 2nd, descending on that day by the Peninjau side to Siniawan, which was a good deal shorter than the Paku route.

All inquiries of the older Dayaks failed to elicit any positive recollections of Wallace's visit here. All they remembered was that the first Rajah, Sir James Brooke, had a bungalow built on this site (which site, by the way, they say he purchased from the Peninjau Dayaks for one cannon), and that he came here often

accompanied by European friends,* and that the present Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke, did the same. Only a few remembered the Chinese rebellion in Sarawak, which took place in 1857, and recollections of that great event seem to have swamped all memories of events before it; so that Wallace's visit in January, 1856, must now be relegated to that great host of events which took place in the irreclaimable past no longer within the memory of man.

“Eheu fugaces, Posthume, Posthume,
Labuntur anni.”

(To be continued.)

* Sir Spenser St. John visited the place in 1851-2, spending some months there in all (see his 'Life in the Forests of the Far East,' 2nd ed. 1863, vol. i. pp. 162-169). Ida Pfeiffer visited the Dayak villages on Serambu in December, 1851 (see her account of it in 'A Lady's Second Journey round the World,' 1856, pp. 50-55). The distinguished botanist, O. Beccari, spent a week there in 1865 (see his 'Wanderings in the Great Forests of Borneo,' 1904, pp. 54-60).