CHARLES WATERTON

WANDERINGS IN SOUTH AMERICA

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

Plutarch, the most famous biographer of ancient times, is of opinion that the uses of telling the history of the men of past ages are to teach wisdom, and to show us by their example how best to spend life. His method is to relate the history of a Greek statesman or soldier, then the history of a Roman whose opportunities of fame resembled those of the Greek, and finally to compare the two. He points out how in the same straits the one hero had shown wisdom, the other imprudence; and that he who had on one occasion fallen short of greatness had on another displayed the highest degree of manly virtue or of genius. If Plutarch's method of teaching should ever be followed by an English biographer, he will surely place side by side and compare two English naturalists, Gilbert White and Charles Waterton.

White was a clergyman of the Church of England, educated at Oxford. Waterton was a Roman Catholic country gentleman, who received his education in a Jesuit college. White spent his life in the south of England, and never travelled. Waterton lived in the north of England, and spent more than ten years in the Forests of Guiana. With all these points of difference, the two

naturalists were men of the same kind, and whose lives both teach the same lesson. They are examples to show that if a man will but look carefully round him in the country his every-day walk may supply him with an enjoyment costing nothing, but surpassed by none which wealth can procure; with food for reflection however long he may live; with problems of which it will be an endless pleasure to attempt the solution; with a spectacle of Infinite Wisdom which will fill his mind with awe and with a constantly increasing assurance of Infinite Goodness, which will do much to help him in all the trials of life. He who lives in the country and has the love of outdoor natural history in his heart, will never be lonely and never dull. Waterton himself thought that this love of natural history must be inborn and could not be acquired. If this be so, they ought indeed to be thankful who possess so happy a gift. Even if Waterton's opinion be not absolutely true, it is at least certain that the taste for outdoor observation can only be acquired in the field, and that this acquisition is rarely made after the period of boyhood.

How important, then, to excite the attention of children in the country to the sights around them. A few will remain apathetic, the tastes of some will lie in other directions, but the time will not be lost, for some will certainly take to natural history, and will have happiness from it throughout life. No study is more likely to confirm them in that content of which a favourite poet of Waterton's truly says:—

"Content is wealth, the riches of the mind,
And happy he who can that treasure find."

Gilbert White and Charles Waterton are pre-eminent among English naturalists for their complete devotion to the study; both excelled as observers, and the writings of both combine the interest of exact outdoor observation with the charm of good literature. Waterton was born on June 3rd, 1782, at Walton Hall, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, a place which had for several centuries been the seat of his family. His father, Thomas Waterton, was a squire, fond of fox-hunting, but with other tastes, well read in literature, and delighting in the observation of the ways of birds and beasts. His grandfather, whose grave is beneath the most northern of a row of old elm trees in the park, was imprisoned in York on account of his known attachment to the cause of the Young Pretender. As he meant to join the rebel forces, the imprisonment probably saved his own life and prevented the ruin of the family. In his grandson's old age, when another white-haired Yorkshire squire was dining at Walton Hall, I remember that Waterton and he reminded one another that their grandfathers had planned to march together to Prince Charley, and that they themselves, so differently are the rights of kings regarded at different ages, when schoolboys together, had gone a-bird's-nesting on a day, in 1793, set apart for mourning for the decapitation of Louis XVI. Waterton has himself told the history of his earlier ancestors in an autobiography which he wrote in

1837:—

"The poet tells us, that the good qualities of man and of cattle descend to their offspring. '*Fortes creantur fortibus et bonis*.' If this holds good, I ought to be pretty well off, as far as breeding goes; for, on the father's side, I come in a direct line from Sir Thomas More, through my grandmother; whilst by the mother's side I am akin to the Bedingfelds of Oxburgh, to the Charltons of Hazelside, and to the Swinburnes of Capheaton. My family has been at Walton Hall for some centuries. It emigrated into Yorkshire from Waterton, in the island of Axeholme in Lincolnshire, where it had been for a very long time. Indeed, I dare say I could trace it up to Father Adam, if my progenitors had only been as careful in preserving family records as the Arabs are in recording the pedigree of their horses; for I do most firmly believe that we are all descended from Adam and his wife Eve, notwithstanding what certain self-sufficient philosophers may have advanced to the contrary. Old Matt Prior had probably an opportunity of laying his hands on family papers of the same purport as those which I have not been able to find; for he positively informs us that Adam and Eve were his ancestors:—

'Gentlemen, here, by your leave,
  Lie the bones of Matthew Prior,
A son of Adam and of Eve:
  Can Bourbon or Nassau go higher?'

Depend upon it, the man under Afric's burning zone, and he from the frozen regions of the North, have both come from the same stem. Their difference in colour and in feature may be traced to this: viz., that the first has had too much, and the second too little, sun.

"In remote times, some of my ancestors were sufficiently notorious to have had their names handed down to posterity. They fought at Cressy, and at Agincourt, and at Marston Moor. Sir Robert Waterton was Governor of Pontefract Castle, and had charge of King Richard II. Sir Hugh Waterton was executor to his Sovereign's will, and guardian to his daughters. Another ancestor was sent into France by the King, with orders to contract a royal marriage. He was allowed thirteen shillings a day for his trouble and travelling expenses. Another was Lord Chancellor of England, and preferred to lose his head rather than sacrifice his conscience."

Waterton's childhood was spent at Walton Hall, and in his old age he used sometimes to recall the songs of his nurses. "One of them," he said, "is the only poem in which the owl is pitied. She sang it to the tune of 'Cease, rude Boreas, blustering railer,' and the words are affecting:—

'Once I was a monarch's daughter,
And sat on a lady's knee;
But am now a nightly rover,
Banished to the ivy tree.

'Crying, Hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo,
Hoo, hoo, my feet are cold!
Pity me, for here you see me
Persecuted, poor, and old.'"

He was already proficient in bird's-nesting when, in 1792, he was sent to a school kept by a Roman Catholic priest, the Reverend Arthur Storey, at Tudhoe, then a small village, five miles from Durham. Three years before his death he wrote an account of his schooldays, which is printed in the Life prefixed to Messrs. Warne's edition of his "Natural History Essays." The honourable character of the schoolmaster, and the simple, adventurous disposition of his pupil, are vividly depicted in this account. The following quotations from it show that preparatory schools were less luxurious in the last century than they commonly are at the present day:—

"But now let me enter into the minutiæ of Tudhoe School. Mr. Storey had two wigs, one of which was of a flaxen colour, without powder, and had only one lower row of curls. The other had two rows, and was exceedingly well powdered. When he appeared in the schoolroom with this last wig on, I know that I was safe from the birch, as he invariably went to Durham and spent the day there. But when I saw that he had his flaxen wig on, my countenance fell. He was in the schoolroom all day, and I was too often placed in a very uncomfortable position at nightfall. But sometimes I had to come in contact with the birch-rod for various frolics independent of school erudition. I once smarted severely

for an act of kindness. We had a boy named Bryan Salvin, from Croxdale Hall. He was a dull, sluggish, and unwieldy lad, quite incapable of climbing exertions. Being dissatisfied with the regulations of the establishment, he came to me one Palm Sunday, and entreated me to get into the schoolroom through the window, and write a letter of complaint to his sister Eliza in York. I did so, having insinuated myself with vast exertion through the iron stanchions which secured the window; '*sed revocare gradum*.' Whilst I was thrusting might and main through the stanchions, on my way out—suddenly, oh, horrible! the schoolroom door flew open, and on the threshold stood the Reverend Mr. Storey—a fiery, frightful, formidable spectre! To my horror and confusion I drove my foot quite through a pane of glass, and there I stuck, impaled and imprisoned, but luckily not injured by the broken glass. Whilst I was thus in unexpected captivity, he cried out, in an angry voice, 'So you are there, Master Charles, are you?' He got assistance, and they pulled me back by main force. But as this was Palm Sunday my execution was obligingly deferred until Monday morning.

"But let us return to Tudhoe. In my time it was a peaceful, healthy farming village, and abounded in local curiosities. Just on the king's highway, betwixt Durham and Bishop-Auckland, and one field from the school, there stood a public-house called the 'White Horse,' and kept by a man of the name of Charlton.

He had a real gaunt English mastiff, half-starved for want of food, and so ferocious that nobody but himself dared to approach

it. This publican had also a mare, surprising in her progeny; she had three foals, in three successive years, not one of which had the least appearance of a tail.

"One of Mr. Storey's powdered wigs was of so tempting an aspect, on the shelf where it was laid up in ordinary, that the cat actually kittened in it. I saw her and her little ones all together in the warm wig. He also kept a little white and black bitch, apparently of King Charles's breed. One evening, as we scholars were returning from a walk, Chloe started a hare, which we surrounded and captured, and carried in triumph to oily Mrs. Atkinson, who begged us a play-day for our success.

"On Easter Sunday Mr. Storey always treated us to 'Pasche eggs.' They were boiled hard in a concoction of whin-flowers, which rendered them beautifully purple. We used them for warlike purposes, by holding them betwixt our forefinger and thumb with the sharp end upwards, and as little exposed as possible. An antagonist then approached, and with the sharp end of his own egg struck this egg. If he succeeded in cracking it, the vanquished egg was his; and he either sold it for a halfpenny in the market, or reserved it for his own eating. When all the sharp ends had been crushed, then the blunt ends entered into battle.

Thus nearly every Pasche egg in the school had its career of combat. The possessor of a strong egg with a thick shell would sometimes vanquish a dozen of his opponents, all of which the conqueror ultimately transferred into his own stomach, when no more eggs with unbroken ends remained to carry on the war of

Easter Week.

"The little black and white bitch once began to snarl, and then to bark at me, when I was on a roving expedition in quest of hens' nests. I took up half a brick and knocked it head over heels. Mr. Storey was watching at the time from one of the upper windows; but I had not seen him, until I heard the sound of his magisterial voice. He beckoned me to his room there and then, and whipped me soundly for my pains.

"Four of us scholars stayed at Tudhoe during the summer vacation, when all the rest had gone home. Two of these had dispositions as malicious as those of two old apes. One fine summer's morning they decoyed me into a field (I was just then from my mother's nursery) where there was a flock of geese. They assured me that the geese had no right to be there; and that it was necessary we should kill them, as they were trespassing on our master's grass. The scamps then furnished me with a hedge-stake. On approaching the flock, behold the gander came out to meet me; and whilst he was hissing defiance at us, I struck him on the neck, and killed him outright. My comrades immediately took to flight, and on reaching the house informed our master of what I had done. But when he heard my unvarnished account of the gander's death, he did not say one single unkind word to me, but scolded most severely the two boys who had led me into the scrape. The geese belonged to a farmer named John Hey, whose son Ralph used to provide me with birds' eggs. Ever after when I passed by his house, some of the children would point to me

and say, 'Yaw killed aur guise.'

"At Bishop-Auckland there lived a man by the name of Charles the Painter. He played extremely well on the Northumberland bagpipe, and his neighbour was a good performer on the flageolet. When we had pleased our master by continued good conduct, he would send for these two musicians, who gave us a delightful evening concert in the general play-room, Mr. Storey himself supplying an extra treat of fruit, cakes, and tea.

"Tudhoe had her own ghosts and spectres, just as the neighbouring villages had theirs. One was the Tudhoe mouse, well known and often seen in every house in the village; but I cannot affirm that I myself ever saw it. It was an enormous mouse, of a dark brown colour, and did an immensity of mischief. No cat could face it; and as it wandered through the village, all the dogs would take off, frightened out of their wits, and howling as they ran away. William Wilkinson, Mr. Storey's farming man, told me he had often seen it, but that it terrified him to such a degree that he could not move from the place where he was standing.

"Our master kept a large tom-cat in the house. A fine young man, in the neighbouring village of Ferry-hill, had been severely bitten by a cat, and he died raving mad. On the day that we got this information from Timothy Pickering, the carpenter at Tudhoe, I was on the prowl for adventures, and in passing through Mr. Storey's back kitchen, his big black cat came up to me.

Whilst I was tickling its bushy tail, it turned round upon me, and gave me a severe bite in the calf of the leg. This I kept a profound secret, but I was quite sure I should go mad every day, for many months afterwards.

"There was a blacksmith's shop leading down the village to Tudhoe Old Hall. Just opposite this shop was a pond, on the other side of the road. When any sudden death was to take place, or any sudden ill to befall the village, a large black horse used to emerge from it, and walk slowly up and down the village, carrying a rider without a head. The blacksmith's grandfather, his father, himself, his three sons, and two daughters, had seen this midnight apparition rise out of the pond, and return to it before the break of day. John Hickson and Neddy Hunt, two hangers-on at the blacksmith's shop, had seen this phantom more than once, but they never durst approach it. Indeed, every man and woman and child believed in this centaur-spectre, and I am not quite sure if our old master himself did not partly believe that such a thing had occasionally been seen on very dark nights.

"Tudhoe has no river, a misfortune '*valde deflendus*.' In other respects the vicinity was charming; and it afforded an ample supply of woods and hedgerow trees to insure a sufficient stock of carrion crows, jackdaws, jays, magpies, brown owls, kestrels, merlins, and sparrow-hawks, for the benefit of natural history and my own instruction and amusement."

In 1796 Waterton left Tudhoe school and went to Stonyhurst College in Lancashire. It was a country house of the picturesque

style of King James I., which had just been made over by Mr. Weld of Lulworth to the Jesuits expelled from Liége. The country round Stonyhurst is varied by hills and streams, and there are mountains at no great distance.

> "Whernside, Pendle Hill, and Ingleboro',
> Three higher hills you'll not find England thoro',"

as they are described, with equal disregard of exact mensuration and of rhythm, in a local rhyme which Waterton learned. Curlew used to fly by in flocks, and the country people had also a rhyme about the curlew:—

> "Be she white or be she black,
> She carries sixpence on her back,"

which Waterton used to say showed how our ancestors valued the bird at table.

At Stonyhurst he read a good deal of Latin and of English literature, and acquired a taste for writing Latin verse. He always looked back on his education there with satisfaction, and in after-life often went to visit the college. Throughout life he never drank wine, and this fortunate habit was the result of the good advice of one of his teachers:—

"My master was Father Clifford, a first cousin of the noble lord of that name. He had left the world, and all its alluring follies, that he might serve Almighty God more perfectly, and

work his way with more security up to the regions of eternal bliss.

After educating those entrusted to his charge with a care and affection truly paternal, he burst a blood-vessel, and retired to Palermo for the benefit of a warmer climate. There he died the death of the just, in the habit of St. Ignatius.

"One day, when I was in the class of poetry, and which was about two years before I left the college for good and all, he called me up to his room. 'Charles,' said he to me, in a tone of voice perfectly irresistible, 'I have long been studying your disposition, and I clearly foresee that nothing will keep you at home. You will journey into far-distant countries, where you will be exposed to many dangers. There is only one way for you to escape them. Promise me that, from this day forward, you will never put your lips to wine, or to spirituous liquors.' 'The sacrifice is nothing,' added he; 'but, in the end, it will prove of incalculable advantage to you.' I agreed to his enlightened proposal; and from that hour to this, which is now about nine-and-thirty years, I have never swallowed one glass of any kind of wine or of ardent spirits."

After leaving college Waterton stayed at home with his father, and enjoyed fox-hunting for a while. To the end of his days he liked to hear of a good run, and he would now and then look with pleasure on an engraving which hung in the usual dining-room at Walton Hall, representing Lord Darlington, the first master of hounds he had known, well seated on a powerful horse and surrounded by very muscular hounds. In 1802 he went to visit two uncles in Spain, and stayed for more than a year, and there

had a terrible experience of pestilence and of earthquake:—

"There began to be reports spread up and down the city that the black vomit had made its appearance; and every succeeding day brought testimony that things were not as they ought to be. I myself, in an alley near my uncles' house, saw a mattress of most suspicious appearance hung out to dry. A Maltese captain, who had dined with us in good health at one o'clock, lay dead in his cabin before sunrise the next morning. A few days after this I was seized with vomiting and fever during the night. I had the most dreadful spasms, and it was supposed that I could not last out till noon the next day. However, strength of constitution got me through it. In three weeks more, multitudes were seen to leave the city, which shortly after was declared to be in a state of pestilence. Some affirmed that the disorder had come from the Levant; others said that it had been imported from the Havanna; but I think it probable that nobody could tell in what quarter it had originated.

"We had now all retired to the country-house—my eldest uncle returning to Malaga from time to time, according as the pressure of business demanded his presence in the city. He left us one Sunday evening, and said he would be back again some time on Monday; but that was my poor uncle's last day's ride. On arriving at his house in Malaga, there was a messenger waiting to inform him that Father Bustamante had fallen sick, and wished to see him. Father Bustamante was an aged priest, who had been particularly kind to my uncle on his first arrival in Malaga. My

uncle went immediately to Father Bustamante, gave him every consolation in his power, and then returned to his own house very unwell, there to die a martyr to his charity. Father Bustamante breathed his last before daylight; my uncle took to his bed, and never rose more. As soon as we had received information of his sickness, I immediately set out on foot for the city. His friend, Mr. Power, now of Gibraltar, was already in his room, doing everything that friendship could suggest or prudence dictate. My uncle's athletic constitution bore up against the disease much longer than we thought it possible. He struggled with it for five days, and sank at last about the hour of sunset. He stood six feet four inches high; and was of so kind and generous a disposition, that he was beloved by all who knew him. Many a Spanish tear flowed when it was known that he had ceased to be. We got him a kind of coffin made, in which he was conveyed at midnight to the outskirts of the town, there to be put into one of the pits which the galley-slaves had dug during the day for the reception of the dead. But they could not spare room for the coffin; so the body was taken out of it, and thrown upon the heap which already occupied the pit. A Spanish marquis lay just below him.

"Thousands died as though they had been seized with cholera, others with black vomit, and others of decided yellow fever. There were a few instances of some who departed this life with very little pain or bad symptoms: they felt unwell, they went to bed, they had an idea that they would not get better, and they expired in a kind of slumber. It was sad in the extreme to see the

bodies placed in the streets at the close of day, to be ready for the dead-carts as they passed along. The dogs howled fearfully during the night. All was gloom and horror in every street; and you might see the vultures on the strand tugging at the bodies which were washed ashore by the eastern wind. It was always said that 50,000 people left the city at the commencement of the pestilence; and that 14,000 of those who remained in it fell victims to the disease.

"There was an intrigue going on at court, for the interest of certain powerful people, to keep the port of Malaga closed long after the city had been declared free from the disorder; so that none of the vessels in the mole could obtain permission to depart for their destination.

"In the meantime the city was shaken with earthquakes; shock succeeding shock, till we all imagined that a catastrophe awaited us similar to that which had taken place at Lisbon. The pestilence killed you by degrees, and its approaches were sufficiently slow, in general, to enable you to submit to it with firmness and resignation; but the idea of being swallowed up alive by the yawning earth at a moment's notice, made you sick at heart, and rendered you almost fearful of your own shadow. The first shock took place at six in the evening, with a noise as though a thousand carriages had dashed against each other. This terrified many people to such a degree that they paced all night long up and down the Alameda, or public walk, rather than retire to their homes. I went to bed a little after midnight, but was roused by another

shock about five o'clock in the morning. It gave the bed a motion which made me fancy that it moved under me from side to side. I sprang up, and having put on my unmentionables (we wore no trousers in those days), I ran out, in all haste, to the Alameda. There the scene was most distressing: multitudes of both sexes, some nearly in a state of nudity, and others sick at stomach, were huddled together, not knowing which way to turn or what to do.

—'Omnes eodem cogimur.'

However, it pleased Heaven, in its mercy, to spare us. The succeeding shocks became weaker and weaker, till at last we felt no more of them."

A courageous sea-captain at last sailed away in safety, though chased by the Spanish brigs of war, and after thirty days at sea Waterton landed in England.

Another uncle had estates in Demerara, and in the autumn Waterton sailed thither from Portsmouth. He landed at Georgetown, Demerara, in November, 1804, and was soon delighted by the natural history of the tropical forest. In 1806 his father died, and he returned to England. He made four more journeys to Guiana, and, in 1825, published an account of them, entitled "Wanderings in South America, the North-West of the United States, and the Antilles, in the years 1812, 1816, 1820, and 1824; with original instructions for the perfect preservation of birds, &c., for cabinets of natural history." The

two first journeys are now reprinted from the original text. The book at once attracted general attention, became popular, and has taken a place among permanent English literature. Unlike most travellers, Waterton tells nothing of his personal difficulties and discomforts, and encumbers his pages with neither statistics nor information of the guidebook kind. His observation of birds and beasts, written down in the forests, and the description of the forests themselves, fill all his pages. The great ant-eater and the sloth were for the first time accurately described by him. He showed that the sloth, instead of being a deformed, unhappy creature, was admirably adapted to its habitat. He explained the use of the great claws of the ant-eater, and the curious gait which they necessitated. The habits of the toucan, of the houtou, of the campanero, and of many other birds, were first correctly described by him. He determined to catch a cayman or alligator, and at last hooked one with a curious wooden hook of four barbs made for him by an Indian.

The adventure which followed is perhaps one of the most famous exploits of an English naturalist.

"We found a cayman, ten feet and a half long, fast to the end of the rope. Nothing now remained to do, but to get him out of the water without injuring his scales, 'hoc opus, hic labor.' We mustered strong: there were three Indians from the creek, there was my own Indian, Yan; Daddy Quashi,[1] the negro from

[1] The negroes of the West Coast of Africa, as I am informed by Dr. Kodjoe Benjamin William Kwatei-kpakpafio, of Accra, take their names from the day of the

Mrs. Peterson's; James, Mr. R. Edmonstone's man, whom I was instructing to preserve birds; and, lastly, myself.

"I informed the Indians that it was my intention to draw him quietly out of the water, and then secure him. They looked and stared at each other, and said I might do it myself, but they would have no hand in it; the cayman would worry some of us. On saying this, 'consedere duces,' they squatted on their hams with the most perfect indifference.

"The Indians of those wilds have never been subject to the least restraint; and I knew enough of them to be aware, that if I tried to force them against their will, they would take off, and leave me and my presents unheeded, and never return.

"Daddy Quashi was for applying to our guns, as usual, considering them our best and safest friends. I immediately offered to knock him down for his cowardice, and he shrank back, begging that I would be cautious, and not get myself worried; and apologising for his own want of resolution. My Indian was now in conversation with the others, and they asked me if I would allow them to shoot a dozen arrows into him, and thus disable him. This would have ruined all. I had come above three hundred miles on purpose to get a cayman uninjured, and not to carry back a mutilated specimen. I rejected their proposition with firmness, and darted a disdainful eye upon the Indians.

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week on which they are born: Quashi (Kwasi) is Sunday; Kodjoe, Monday; Koffie, Tuesday.—N. M.

"Daddy Quashi was again beginning to remonstrate, and I chased him on the sand-bank for a quarter of a mile. He told me afterwards, he thought he should have dropped down dead with fright, for he was firmly persuaded, if I had caught him, I should have bundled him into the cayman's jaws. Here then we stood, in silence, like a calm before a thunder-storm. 'Hoc res summa loco. Scinditur in contraria valgus.' They wanted to kill him, and I wanted to take him alive.

"I now walked up and down the sand, revolving a dozen projects in my head. The canoe was at a considerable distance, and I ordered the people to bring it round to the place where we were. The mast was eight feet long, and not much thicker than my wrist. I took it out of the canoe, and wrapped the sail round the end of it. Now it appeared clear to me, that if I went down upon one knee, and held the mast in the same position as the soldier holds his bayonet when rushing to the charge, I could force it down the cayman's throat, should he come open-mouthed at me. When this was told to the Indians, they brightened up, and said they would help me to pull him out of the river.

"'Brave squad!' said I to myself, "'Audax omnia perpeti," now that you have got me betwixt yourselves and danger.' I then mustered all hands for the last time before the battle. We were, four South American savages, two negroes from Africa, a creole from Trinidad, and myself, a white man from Yorkshire. In fact, a little Tower of Babel group, in dress, no dress, address, and language.

"Daddy Quashi hung in the rear; I showed him a large Spanish knife, which I always carried in the waistband of my trousers: it spoke volumes to him, and he shrugged up his shoulders in absolute despair. The sun was just peeping over the high forests on the eastern hills, as if coming to look on, and bid us act with becoming fortitude. I placed all the people at the end of the rope, and ordered them to pull till the cayman appeared on the surface of the water and then, should he plunge, to slacken the rope and let him go again into the deep.

"I now took the mast of the canoe in my hand (the sail being tied round the end of the mast) and sank down upon one knee, about four yards from the water's edge, determining to thrust it down his throat, in case he gave me an opportunity. I certainly felt somewhat uncomfortable in this situation, and I thought of Cerberus on the other side of the Styx ferry. The people pulled the cayman to the surface; he plunged furiously as soon as he arrived in these upper regions, and immediately went below again on their slackening the rope. I saw enough not to fall in love at first sight. I now told them we would run all risks, and have him on land immediately. They pulled again, and out he came—'monstrum horrendum, informe.' This was an interesting moment. I kept my position firmly, with my eye fixed steadfast on him.

"By the time the cayman was within two yards of me, I saw he was in a state of fear and perturbation: I instantly dropped the mast, sprang up, and jumped on his back, turning half round as I

vaulted, so that I gained my seat with my face in a right position.

I immediately seized his fore-legs, and by main force twisted them on his back; thus they served me for a bridle.

"He now seemed to have recovered from his surprise, and probably fancying himself in hostile company, be began to plunge furiously, and lashed the sand with his long and powerful tail. I was out of reach of the strokes of it, by being near his head. He continued to plunge and strike, and made my seat very uncomfortable. It must have been a fine sight for an unoccupied spectator.

"The people roared out in triumph, and were so vociferous, that it was some time before they heard me tell them to pull me and my beast of burthen farther in. I was apprehensive the rope might break, and then there would have been every chance of going down to the regions under water with the cayman. That would have been more perilous than Arion's marine morning ride:—

'Delphini insidens vada cærula sulcat Arion.'

"The people now dragged us about forty yards on the sand; it was the first and last time I was ever on a cayman's back. Should it be asked, how I managed to keep my seat, I would answer—I hunted some years with Lord Darlington's fox-hounds.

"After repeated attempts to regain his liberty, the cayman gave in, and became tranquil through exhaustion. I now managed

to do up his jaws, and firmly secured his fore-feet in the position I had held them. We had now another severe struggle for superiority, but he was soon overcome, and again remained quiet.

While some of the people were pressing upon his head and shoulders, I threw myself on his tail, and by keeping it down to the sand, prevented him from kicking up another dust. He was finally conveyed to the canoe, and then to the place where we had suspended our hammocks. There I cut his throat; and after breakfast was over, commenced the dissection."

After his fourth journey Waterton occasionally travelled on the Continent, but for the most part resided at Walton Hall. In the park he made the observations afterwards published as "Essays on Natural History," in three series, and since reprinted, with his Life and Letters, by Messrs. Warne and Co.

Walton Hall is situated on an island surrounded by its ancient moat, a lake of about five-and-twenty acres in extent. From the shores of the lake the land rises; parts of the slope, and nearly all the highest part, being covered with wood.

In one wood there was a large heronry, in another a rookery. Several hollow trees were haunted by owls, in the summer goat-suckers were always to be seen in the evening flying about two oaks on the hill. At one end of the lake in summer the kingfisher might be watched fishing, and throughout the year herons waded round its shores picking up fresh-water mussels, or stood motionless for hours, watching for fish. In winter, when the lake was frozen, three or four hundred wild duck, with teal

and pochards, rested on it all day, and flew away at night to feed; while widgeons fed by day on its shores. Coots and water-hens used to come close to the windows and pick up food put out for them. The Squire built a wall nine feet high all round his park, and he used laughingly to say that he paid for it with the cost of the wine which he did not drink after dinner.

A more delightful home for a naturalist could not have been. No shot was ever fired within the park wall, and every year more birds came. Waterton used often to quote the lines:—

> "No bird that haunts my valley free
> To slaughter I condemn;
> Taught by the Power that pities me,
> I learn to pity them;"

and each new-comer added to his happiness. In his latter days the household usually consisted of the Squire, as he was always called, and of his two sisters-in-law, for he had lost his wife soon after his marriage in 1829. He breakfasted at eight, dined in the middle of the day, and drank tea in the evening. He went to bed early, and slept upon the bare floor, with a block of wood for his pillow. He rose for the day at half-past three, and spent the hour from four to five at prayer in his chapel. He then read every morning a chapter in a Spanish Life of St. Francis Xavier, followed by a chapter of "Don Quixote" in the original, after which he used to stuff birds or write letters till breakfast. Most of the day he spent in the open air, and when the weather was cold

would light a fire of sticks and warm himself by it. So active did he continue to the end of his days, that on his eightieth birthday he climbed an oak in my company. He was very kind to the poor, and threw open a beautiful part of his park to excursionists all through the summer. He had a very tender heart for beasts and birds, as well as for men. If a cat looked hungry he would see that she had a meal, and sometimes when he had forgotten to put a crust of bread in his pocket before starting on his afternoon walk, he would say to his companion, "How shall we ever get past that goose?" for there was a goose which used to wait for him in the evening at the end of the bridge over the moat, and he could not bear to disappoint it. If he could not find a bit of food for it, he would wait at a distance till the bird went away, rather than give it nothing when it raised its bill.

Towards the end of his life I enjoyed his friendship, and can never forget his kindly welcome, his pithy conversation, the happy humour with which he expressed the conclusions of his long experience of men, birds and beasts, and the goodness which shone from his face. I was staying at Walton when he died, and have thus described his last hours in the biography which is prefixed to the latest edition of his Essays.[2] I was reading for an examination, and used, on the Squire's invitation, to go and chat with him just after midnight, for at that hour be always awoke, and paid a short visit to his chapel. A little before midnight on

[2] "Natural History Essays," by Charles Waterton, edited, with a life of the author, by Norman Moore (Warne and Co.).

May 24th I visited him in his room. He was sitting asleep by his fire wrapped up in a large Italian cloak.

His head rested upon his wooden pillow, which was placed on a table, and his thick silvery hair formed a beautiful contrast with the dark colour of the oak. He soon woke up, and withdrew to the chapel, and on his return we talked together for three-quarters of an hour about the brown owl, the nightjar, and other birds. The next morning, May 25, he was unusually cheerful, and said to me, "That was a very pleasant little confab we had last night: I do not suppose there was such another going on in England at the same time." After breakfast we went with a carpenter to finish some bridges at the far end of the park. The work was completed, and we were proceeding homewards when, in crossing a small bridge, a bramble caught the Squire's foot, and he fell heavily upon a log.

He was greatly shaken, and said he thought he was dying. He walked, notwithstanding, a little way, and was then compelled to lie down. He would not permit his sufferings to distract his mind, and he pointed out to the carpenter some trees which were to be felled. He presently continued his route, and managed to reach the spot where the boat was moored. Hitherto he had refused all assistance, but he could not step from the bank into the boat, and he said, "I am afraid I must ask you to help me in." He walked from the landing-place into the house, changed his clothes, and came and sat in the large room below. The pain increasing, he rose from his seat after he had seen his doctor, and though he had been bent double with anguish, he persisted in walking up-

stairs without help, and would have gone to his own room in the top storey, if, for the sake of saving trouble to others, he had not been induced to stop half-way in Miss Edmonstone's sitting-room. Here he lay down upon the sofa, and was attended by his sisters-in-law. The pain abated, and the next day he seemed better. In the afternoon he talked to me a good deal, chiefly about natural history. But he was well aware of his perilous condition, for he remarked to me, "This is a bad business," and later on he felt his pulse often, and said, "It is a bad case." He was more than self-possessed. A benignant cheerfulness beamed from his mind, and in the fits of pain he frequently looked up with a gentle smile, and made some little joke. Towards midnight he grew worse. The priest, the Reverend R. Browne, was summoned, and Waterton got ready to die. He pulled himself upright without help, sat in the middle of the sofa, and gave his blessing in turn to his grandson, Charlie, to his granddaughter, Mary, to each of his sisters-in-law, to his niece, and to myself, and left a message for his son, who was hastening back from Rome. He then received the last sacraments, repeated all the responses, Saint Bernard's hymn in English, and the first two verses of the *Dies Iræ*. The end was now at hand, and he died at twenty-seven minutes past two in the morning of May 27, 1865. The window was open. The sky was beginning to grow grey, a few rooks had cawed, the swallows were twittering, the landrail was craking from the Ox-close, and a favourite cock, which he used to call his morning gun, leaped out from some hollies, and gave his accustomed crow. The ear

of his master was deaf to the call. He had obeyed a sublimer summons, and had woke up to the glories of the eternal world.

He was buried on his birthday, the 3rd of June, between two great oaks at the far end of the lake, the oldest trees in the park. He had put up a rough stone cross to mark the spot where he wished to be buried. Often on summer days he had sat in the shade of these oaks watching the kingfishers. "Cock Robin and the magpies," he said to me as we sat by the trees one day, "will mourn my loss, and you will sometimes remember me when I lie here." At the foot of the cross is a Latin inscription which he wrote himself. It could hardly be simpler: "Pray for the soul of Charles Waterton, whose tired bones are buried near this cross." The dates of his birth and death are added.

Walton Hall is no longer the home of the Watertons, the oaks are too old to flourish many years more, and in time the stone cross may be overthrown and the exact burial place of Waterton be forgotten; but his "Wanderings in South America" and his "Natural History Essays" will always be read, and are for him a memorial like that claimed by the poet he read oftenest—

> "quod nec Jovis ira, nec ignes,
> Nec poterit ferrum, nec edax abolere vetustas."

Norman Moore.

FIRST JOURNEY

—"nec herba, nec latens in asperis
Radix fefellit me locis."

In the month of April, 1812, I left the town of Stabroek, to travel through the wilds of Demerara and Essequibo, a part of *ci-devant* Dutch Guiana, in South America.

The chief objects in view were to collect a quantity of the strongest wourali-poison; and to reach the inland frontier fort of Portuguese Guiana.

It would be a tedious journey for him who wishes to travel through these wilds to set out from Stabroek on foot. The sun would exhaust him in his attempts to wade through the swamps, and the mosquitos at night would deprive him of every hour of sleep.

The road for horses runs parallel to the river, but it extends a very little way, and even ends before the cultivation of the plantation ceases.

The only mode then that remains is to proceed by water; and when you come to the high lands, you may make your way through the forest on foot, or continue your route on the river.

After passing the third island in the river Demerara, there are few plantations to be seen, and those not joining on to one

another, but separated by large tracts of wood.

The Loo is the last where the sugar-cane is growing. The greater part of its negroes have just been ordered to another estate; and ere a few months shall have elapsed all signs of cultivation will be lost in under-wood.

Higher up stand the sugar-works of Amelia's Waard, solitary and abandoned; and after passing these there is not a ruin to inform the traveller that either coffee or sugar has been cultivated.

From Amelia's Waard an unbroken range of forest covers each bank of the river, saving here and there where a hut discovers itself, inhabited by free people of colour, with a rood or two of bared ground about it; or where the wood-cutter has erected himself a dwelling, and cleared a few acres for pasturage.

Sometimes you see level ground on each side of you for two or three hours at a stretch; at other times a gently sloping hill presents itself; and often, on turning a point, the eye is pleased with the contrast of an almost perpendicular height jutting into the water. The trees put you in mind of an eternal spring, with summer and autumn kindly blended into it.

Here you may see a sloping extent of noble trees, whose foliage displays a charming variety of every shade from the lightest to the darkest green and purple. The tops of some are crowned with bloom of the loveliest hue; while the boughs of others bend with a profusion of seeds and fruits.

Those whose heads have been bared by time, or blasted by the

thunder-storm, strike the eye, as a mournful sound does the ear in music; and seem to beckon to the sentimental traveller to stop a moment or two, and see that the forests which surround him, like men and kingdoms, have their periods of misfortune and decay.

The first rocks of any considerable size that are observed on the side of the river are at a place called Saba, from the Indian word, which means a stone. They appear sloping down to the water's edge, not shelvy, but smooth, and their exuberances rounded off, and, in some places, deeply furrowed, as though they had been worn with continual floods of water.

There are patches of soil up and down, and the huge stones amongst them produce a pleasing and novel effect. You see a few coffee-trees of a fine luxuriant growth; and nearly on the top of Saba stands the house of the post-holder.

He is appointed by government to give in his report to the protector of the Indians of what is going on amongst them, and to prevent suspicious people from passing up the river.

When the Indians assemble here the stranger may have an opportunity of seeing the aborigines dancing to the sound of their country music, and painted in their native style. They will shoot their arrows for him with an unerring aim, and send the poisoned dart from the blow-pipe true to its destination; and here he may often view all the different shades, from the red savage to the white man, and from the white man to the sootiest son of Africa.

Beyond this post there are no more habitations of white men, or free people of colour.

In a country so extensively covered with wood as this is, having every advantage that a tropical sun and the richest mould, in many places, can give to vegetation, it is natural to look for trees of very large dimensions; but it is rare to meet with them above six yards in circumference. If larger have ever existed, they had fallen a sacrifice either to the axe or to fire.

If, however, they disappoint you in size, they make ample amends in height. Heedless and bankrupt in all curiosity must he be who can journey on without stopping to take a view of the towering mora. Its topmost branch, when naked with age or dried by accident, is the favourite resort of the toucan. Many a time has this singular bird felt the shot faintly strike him from the gun of the fowler beneath, and owed his life to the distance betwixt them.

The trees which form these far-extending wilds are as useful as they are ornamental. It would take a volume of itself to describe them.

The green-heart, famous for its hardness and durability; the hackea, for its toughness; the ducalabali, surpassing mahogany; the ebony and letter-wood vieing with the choicest woods of the old world; the locust tree, yielding copal; and the hayawa and olon trees, furnishing a sweet-smelling resin, are all to be met with in the forest, betwixt the plantations and the rock Saba.

Beyond this rock the country has been little explored; but it is very probable that these, and a vast collection of other kinds, and possibly many new species, are scattered up and down, in

all directions, through the swamps, and hills, and savannas of *ci-devant* Dutch Guiana.

On viewing the stately trees around him the naturalist will observe many of them bearing leaves, and blossoms, and fruit, not their own.

The wild fig-tree, as large as a common English apple-tree, often rears itself from one of the thick branches at the top of the mora; and when its fruit is ripe, to it the birds resort for nourishment. It was to an undigested seed, passing through the body of the bird which had perched on the mora, that the fig-tree first owed its elevated station there. The sap of the mora raised it into full bearing; but now, in its turn, it is doomed to contribute a portion of its own sap and juices towards the growth of different species of vines, the seeds of which, also, the birds deposited on its branches. These soon vegetate, and bear fruit in great quantities; so what with their usurpation of the resources of the fig-tree, and the fig-tree of the mora, the mora, unable to support a charge which nature never intended it should, languishes and dies under its burden; and then the fig-tree, and its usurping progeny of vines, receiving no more succour from their late foster-parent, droop and perish in their turn.

A vine called the bush-rope by the wood-cutters, on account of its use in hauling out the heaviest timber, has a singular appearance in the forests of Demerara. Sometimes you see it nearly as thick as a man's body, twisted like a cork-screw round the tallest trees, and rearing its head high above their

tops. At other times three or four of them, like strands in a cable, join tree and tree and branch and branch together. Others, descending from on high, take root as soon as their extremity touches the ground, and appear like shrouds and stays supporting the main-mast of a line-of-battle ship; while others, sending out parallel, oblique, horizontal, and perpendicular shoots in all directions, put you in mind of what travellers call a matted forest.

Oftentimes a tree, above a hundred feet high, uprooted by the whirlwind, is stopped in its fall by these amazing cables of nature; and hence it is that you account for the phenomenon of seeing trees not only vegetating, but sending forth vigorous shoots, though far from their perpendicular, and their trunks inclined to every degree from the meridian to the horizon.

Their heads remain firmly supported by the bush-rope; many of their roots soon refix themselves in the earth, and frequently a strong shoot will sprout out perpendicularly from near the root of the reclined trunk, and in time become a fine tree. No grass grows under the trees; and few weeds, except in the swamps.

The high grounds are pretty clear of underwood, and with a cutlass to sever the small bush-ropes, it is not difficult walking among the trees.

The soil, chiefly formed by the fallen leaves and decayed trees, is very rich and fertile in the valleys. On the hills it is little better than sand. The rains seem to have carried away and swept into the valleys every particle which nature intended to have formed a mould.

Four-footed animals are scarce, considering how very thinly these forests are inhabited by men.

Several species of the animal commonly called tiger, though in reality it approaches nearer to the leopard, are found here; and two of their diminutives, named tiger-cats. The tapir, the labba, and deer, afford excellent food, and chiefly frequent the swamps and low ground, near the sides of the river and creeks.

In stating that four-footed animals are scarce, the peccary must be excepted. Three or four hundred of them herd together, and traverse the wilds in all directions, in quest of roots and fallen seeds. The Indians mostly shoot them with poisoned arrows. When wounded, they run about one hundred and fifty paces; they then drop, and make wholesome food.

The red monkey, erroneously called the baboon, is heard oftener than it is seen; while the common brown monkey, the bisa, and sacawinki, rove from tree to tree, and amuse the stranger as he journeys on.

A species of the polecat, and another of the fox, are destructive to the Indian's poultry; while the opossum, the guana, and salempenta afford him a delicious morsel.

The small ant-bear, and the large one, remarkable for its long, broad bushy tail, are sometimes seen on the tops of the wood-ants' nests; the armadillos bore in the sand-hills, like rabbits in a warren; and the porcupine is now and then discovered in the trees over your head.

This, too, is the native country of the sloth. His looks, his

gestures, and his cries, all conspire to entreat you to take pity on him. These are the only weapons of defence which nature has given him. While other animals assemble in herds, or in pairs range through these boundless wilds, the sloth is solitary, and almost stationary; he cannot escape from you. It is said, his piteous moans make the tiger relent, and turn out of the way. Do not then level your gun at him, or pierce him with a poisoned arrow; he has never hurt one living creature. A few leaves, and those of the commonest and coarsest kind, are all he asks for his support. On comparing him with other animals, you would say that you could perceive deficiency, deformity, and superabundance in his composition. He has no cutting teeth, and though four stomachs, he still wants the long intestines of ruminating animals. He has only one inferior aperture, as in birds. He has no soles to his feet, nor has he the power of moving his toes separately. His hair is flat, and puts you in mind of grass withered by the wintry blast. His legs are too short; they appear deformed by the manner in which they are joined to the body; and when he is on the ground, they seem as if only calculated to be of use in climbing trees. He has forty-six ribs, while the elephant has only forty; and his claws are disproportionably long.

Were you to mark down, upon a graduated scale, the different claims to superiority amongst the four-footed animals, this poor ill-formed creature's claim would be the last upon the lowest degree.

Demerara yields to no country in the world in her wonderful

and beautiful productions of the feathered race. Here the finest precious stones are far surpassed by the vivid tints which adorn the birds. The naturalist may exclaim, that nature has not known where to stop in forming new species, and painting her requisite shades. Almost every one of those singular and elegant birds described by Buffon as belonging to Cayenne are to be met with in Demerara; but it is only by an indefatigable naturalist that they are to be found.

The scarlet curlew breeds in innumerable quantities in the muddy islands on the coasts of Pomauron; the egrets and crabiers in the same place. They resort to the mud-flats at ebbing water, while thousands of sandpipers and plovers, with here and there a spoonbill and flamingo, are seen amongst them. The pelicans go farther out to sea, but return at sundown to the courada trees.

The humming-birds are chiefly to be found near the flowers at which each of the species of the genus is wont to feed. The pie, the gallinaceous, the columbine, and passerine tribes, resort to the fruit-bearing trees.

You never fail to see the common vulture where there is carrion. In passing up the river there was an opportunity of seeing a pair of the king of the vultures; they were sitting on the naked branch of a tree, with about a dozen of the common ones with them. A tiger had killed a goat the day before; he had been driven away in the act of sucking the blood, and not finding it safe or prudent to return, the goat remained in the same place where he had killed it; it had begun to putrefy, and the vultures

had arrived that morning to claim the savoury morsel.

At the close of day, the vampires leave the hollow trees, whither they had fled at the morning's dawn, and scour along the river's banks in quest of prey. On waking from sleep, the astonished traveller finds his hammock all stained with blood. It is the vampire that has sucked him. Not man alone, but every unprotected animal, is exposed to his depredations; and so gently does this nocturnal surgeon draw the blood, that instead of being roused, the patient is lulled into a still profounder sleep. There are two species of vampire in Demerara, and both suck living animals; one is rather larger than the common bat; the other measures above two feet from wing to wing extended.

Snakes are frequently met with in the woods betwixt the sea-coast and the rock Saba, chiefly near the creeks and on the banks of the river. They are large, beautiful, and formidable. The rattlesnake seems partial to a tract of ground known by the name of Canal Number Three; there the effects of his poison will be long remembered.

The camoudi snake has been killed from thirty to forty feet long; though not venomous, his size renders him destructive to the passing animals. The Spaniards in the Oroonoque positively affirm that he grows to the length of seventy or eighty feet, and that he will destroy the strongest and largest bull. His name seems to confirm this; there he is called "matatoro," which literally means "bull-killer." Thus he may be ranked amongst the deadly snakes: for it comes nearly to the same thing in the end,

whether the victim dies by poison from the fangs, which corrupts his blood and makes it stink horribly, or whether his body be crushed to mummy and swallowed by this hideous beast.

The whipsnake, of a beautiful changing green, and the coral with alternate broad transverse bars of black and red, glide from bush to bush, and may be handled with safety; they are harmless little creatures.

The labarri snake is speckled, of a dirty brown colour, and can scarcely be distinguished from the ground or stump on which he is coiled up; he grows to the length of about eight feet, and his bite often proves fatal in a few minutes.

Unrivalled in his display of every lovely colour of the rainbow, and unmatched in the effects of his deadly poison, the counacouchi glides undaunted on, sole monarch of these forests; he is commonly known by the name of the bush-master. Both man and beast fly before him, and allow him to pursue an undisputed path. He sometimes grows to the length of fourteen feet.

A few small caymans, from two to twelve feet long, may be observed now and then in passing up and down the river: they just keep their heads above the water, and a stranger would not know them from a rotten stump.

Lizards of the finest green, brown, and copper colour, from two inches to two feet and a half long, are ever and anon rustling among the fallen leaves, and crossing the path before you; whilst the chameleon is busily employed in chasing insects round the

trunks of the neighbouring trees.

The fish are of many different sorts, and well-tasted, but not, generally speaking, very plentiful. It is probable that their numbers are considerably thinned by the otters, which are much larger than those of Europe. In going through the overflowed savannas which have all a communication with the river, you may often see a dozen or two of them sporting among the sedges before you.

This warm and humid climate seems particularly adapted to the producing of insects; it gives birth to myriads, beautiful past description in their variety of tints, astonishing in their form and size, and many of them noxious in their qualities.

He whose eye can distinguish the various beauties of uncultivated nature, and whose ear is not shut to the wild sounds in the woods, will be delighted in passing up the river Demerara.

Every now and then, the maam or tinamou sends forth one long and plaintive whistle from the depths of the forest, and then stops; whilst the yelping of the toucan, and the shrill voice of the bird called pi-pi-yo, is heard during the interval. The campanero never fails to attract the attention of the passenger: at a distance of nearly three miles you may hear this snow-white bird tolling every four or five minutes, like the distant convent bell. From six to nine in the morning the forests resound with the mingled cries and strains of the feathered race; after this they gradually die away. From eleven to three all nature is hushed as in a midnight silence, and scarce a note is heard, saving that of the campanero

and the pi-pi-yo; it is then that, oppressed by the solar heat, the birds retire to the thickest shade and wait for the refreshing cool of evening.

At sun-down the vampires, bats, and goat-suckers dart from their lonely retreat, and skim along the trees on the river's bank. The different kinds of frogs almost stun the ear with their hoarse and hollow-sounding croaking, while the owls and goat-suckers lament and mourn all night long.

About two hours before daybreak you will hear the red monkey moaning as though in deep distress; the houtou, a solitary bird, and only found in the thickest recesses of the forest, distinctly articulates, "houtou, houtou," in a low and plaintive tone, an hour before sunrise; the maam whistles about the same hour; the hannaquoi, pataca, and maroudi announce his near approach to the eastern horizon, and the parrots and parroquets confirm his arrival there.

The crickets chirp from sunset to sunrise, and often during the day, when the weather is cloudy. The bêterouge is exceeding numerous in these extensive wilds, and not only man, but beasts and birds, are tormented by it. Mosquitos are very rare after you pass the third island in the Demerara, and sand-flies but seldom appear.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.