

WILLIAM BEEBE'S "JUNGLE PEACE"

Reviewed for

The New York Times Review of Books

By THEODORE ROOSEVELT

An addition to American literature

Mr. Beebe's volume is one of the rare books which represent a positive addition to the sum total of genuine literature. It is not merely a "book of the season" or "book of the year"; it will stand on the shelves of a cultivated people, of people whose taste in reading is both wide and good, as long as men and women appreciate charm of form in the writings of men who also combine love of daring adventure with the power to observe and vividly to record the things of strange interest which they have seen.

If I had space I would like to give an abstract of the whole book. As it is I must advise all who love good books, very good books, at once to get this book of Mr. Beebe.

Theodore Roosevelt

Facsimiles of the First and Last Paragraphs of Col. Roosevelt's Review

Middle Ages there had been many "beastaries," in which the natural history was for the most part fabulous; and many French and German, and some Italian, Spanish, and English hunting books, which were for the most part as stiff and technical as treatises on farriery.

But Bruce and Le Vaillant at last foreshadowed the wilderness-wanderers, half explorers, half big game hunters, of our own day; with Gilbert White, there appeared the first book of literary work by a stay-at-home lover of nature and natural history; and a century ago Waterton's "Wanderings" marked the beginning of the literature wherein field naturalists who are also men of letters and men of action have described for us the magic and interest, the terror and beauty of the far-off wilds where nature gives peace to bold souls and inspires terror in the timid.

Gilbert White and Waterton added in new ways to the sum of achievement of men of letters. Each made a contribution to literature as new and distinctive as the Idylls of Theocritus—it is not necessary to compare the worth of two kinds of literary work, and in speaking of Theocritus I am making no such comparison, but merely indicating that literature may be literature even although of a totally new type. The new literature, of appreciative love of nature and of hardy out-door life, will appeal only to the never very extensive class which neither ignorantly believes that literature is purely an affair of the lamp and the library, nor ignorantly proclaims its own shortcomings and conceit by boasting that it does not value books because, forsooth, it is too "red-blooded" to care for anything except action. A really

first-class hunting book, for instance, ought to be written by a man of prowess and adventure, who is a fair out-of-doors naturalist; who loves nature, who loves books, and who possesses the gift of seeing what is worth seeing and of portraying it with vivid force and yet with refinement. Such men are rare; and it is not always easy for them to command an audience.

In his own much larger field Mr. Beebe is just such a man; and he has such marked ability that he can make and command his audience. Exactly as John Burroughs is the man who has carried to its highest point of development the school in which Gilbert White was the first scholar, so Beebe is the man who has turned into a new type of higher literature the kind of work first produced by Waterton.

Nothing of this kind could have been done by the man who was only a good writer, only a trained scientific observer, or only an enterprising and adventurous traveler. Mr. Beebe is not merely one of these, but all three; and he is very much more in addition. He possesses a wide field of interest; he is in the truest sense of the word a man of broad and deep cultivation. He cares greatly for noble architecture and noble poetry; for beautiful pictures and statues and finely written books. Nor are his interests only concerned with nature apart from man and from the works of man. He possesses an extraordinary sympathy with and understanding of mankind itself, in all its myriad types and varieties. In this book, and in his other recent writing (for I wish to draw a sharp line in favor of what he has recently written as compared with his earlier and more com-

monplace work), some of his most interesting descriptions are of the wild folk he meets in the wilderness—black or yellow, brown or red—and of some nominally tamer folk with whom he has foregathered in civilization.

I don't know in which category, civilization or savagery, the trenches at the front ought to come; but Mr. Beebe, a man of deeds as well as of books, knows the trenches and the people in them, and the pathetic or pitiful or else wholly brave and admirable people back of them; and his sketches of some of them and of their deeds and of the by-products of war as waged today are wholly admirable. Lowell, praising the Elizabethans as both doers and writers, spoke of Ben Jonson's having trailed a pike in the lowlands, and of Kenelm Digby's having illustrated a point in physics by the effects of the concussion of the guns in the sea fight in which he took part off Scanderon. Beebe, as bomber, has sailed in planes over the German lines; in company with a French officer he has listened to a wolf howl just back of the fighting front; he has gone with Iroquois Indians into the No Man's Land between the trenches of the mightiest armies the world has ever seen.

This volume was written when the writer's soul was sick of the carnage which has turned the soil of Northern France into a red desert of horror. To him the jungle seemed peaceful, and the undying war among its furtive dwellers but a small thing compared to the awful contest raging among the most highly civilized of the nations of mankind. It is the same feeling that makes strong men, who have sickened of the mean and squalid injustice of so much of life in the centres of material progress, turn with longing to the waste places where no paths penetrate the frowning or smiling forests and no keels furrow the lonely rivers.

The jungle he herein describes is that of Guiana; and in the introductory chapters he gives cameos of what one sees sailing southward through the lovely islands where the fronds of the palms thrash endlessly as the warm trade blows. He knows well and intimately Malaysia and the East Indian island, and Ceylon and Farther India and mid-China and the stupendous mountain masses of the Himalayas. All of these he will some time put before us, in volumes not one of which can be spared from the library of any man who loves life and literature. This is the first of these volumes. In it are records of extraordinary scientific interest, in language which has all the charm of an essay of Robert Louis Stevenson. He tells of bird and beast and plant and insect; of the hoatzin, a bird out of place in the modern world, a bird which comes down unchanged from a time when birds merely fluttered instead of flying—and had only recently learned to flutter instead of gliding. Whatever he touches he turns into the gold of truth rightly interpreted and vividly set forth—as witness his extraordinary account of the sleeping parlor of certain gorgeous tropic butterflies.

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Nothing like this type of book was written until within the last century and a half. Books of this kind can only be produced in a refined, cultivated, civilized society. In rude societies there may be much appreciation of outdoor life, much fierce joy in hunting, much longing for adventurous wandering, but the appreciation and joy are inarticulate; for in such societies the people who write are generally not the people who act, and they express emotions by words as conventional as Egyptian hieroglyphics. In the popular poetry which has come down to us from early times, in the ballads of Britain and France, and the folk songs of the Russian and Turkish steppes, there are occasional lines which bring before us the song birds in Spring, in the merry greenwood, or the great flocks of water fowl on the ponds of the plains of green grass; but they are merely a few words of incidental description of the land through which the hero rides to foray and battle. We do not pass much beyond this stage even with Chaucer and the Minnesingers; and although the heroes of the Nibelungenlied were mighty hunters, those who described their deeds knew nothing of the game, even of their own forests. There were sovereigns of Nineveh whose devotion to the bolder forms of the chase was a passion; and Kings and Queens of Memphis and Thebes who with absorbed and intelligent curiosity sought for information about the life of far-off lands; but their laborious writings, if they did not deal with business contracts, were generally concerned only with boastful annals or religious ritual.

Hitherto there have been only two periods of Western history in which both the art of expression, and the breadth of interest among cultivated men, grew to a point which permitted the cultivated man to turn back to the life of the open which his inarticulate ancestor had gradually abandoned, and to enjoy, appreciate, and describe it.

One of these periods included the society which enjoyed Theocritus and the society which applauded the country poems of Virgil. The other includes our own time, and may roughly be said to have begun when the rise of writers like Pope showed that English eighteenth century society had at last regained the level of the ancient society which enjoyed Cicero and Horace and Pliny; in France the advance had been more rapid.

It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that there appeared (in primitive form, of course, as with all early types) "nature books" and books of natural history, big game hunting and adventures in out-of-the-way lands. In the