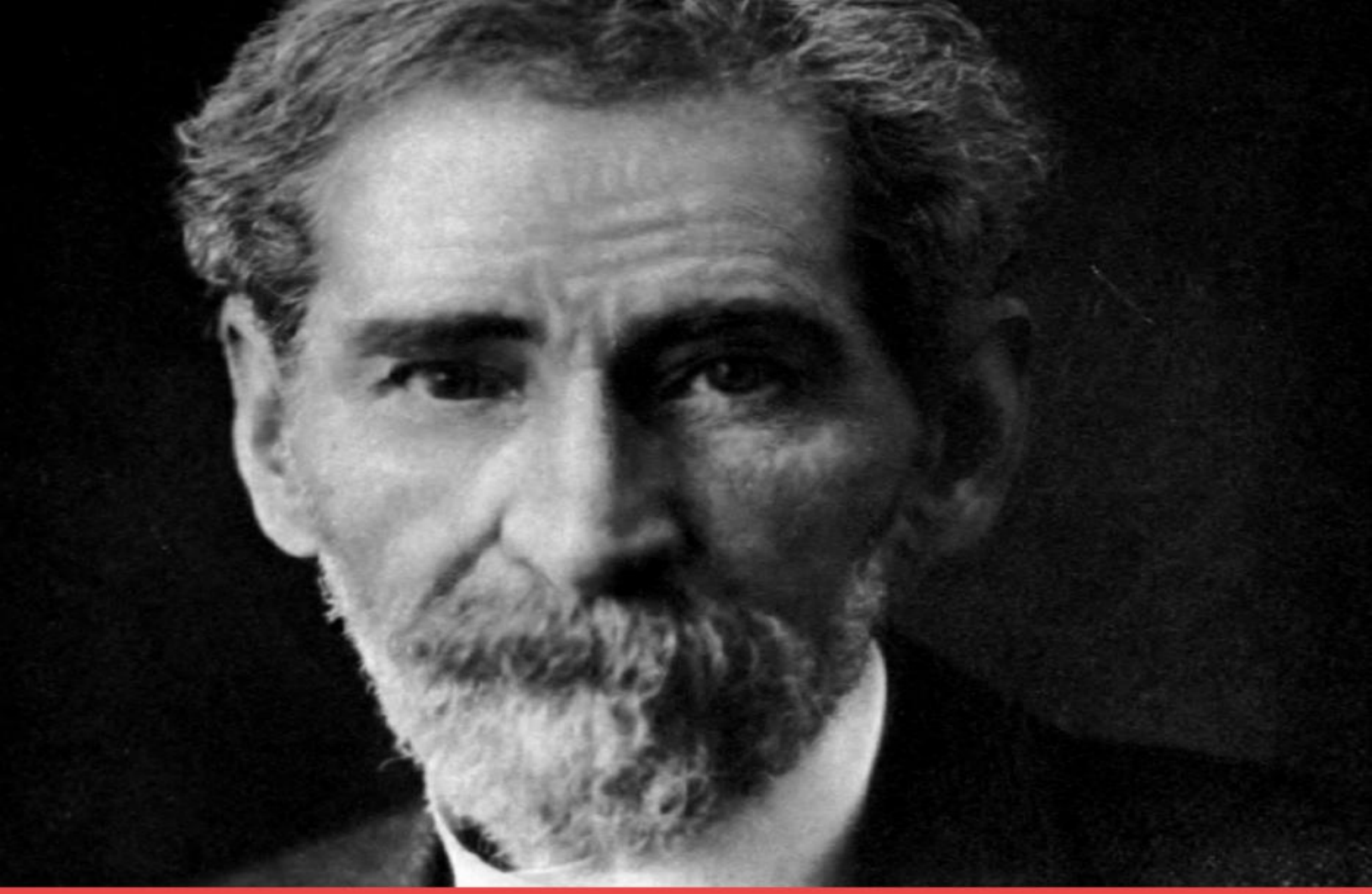

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

AUTHOR AND NATURALIST

ESSENTIAL NOVELISTS

TACET BOOKS

ESSENTIAL NOVELISTS

William Henry Hudson

EDITED BY

August Nemo

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Author

Hudson was born in Quilmes, near Buenos Aires, Argentina. He was the son of Daniel Hudson and his wife Catherine née Kemble, United States settlers of English and Irish origin. He spent his youth studying the local flora and fauna and observing both natural and human dramas on what was then a lawless frontier, publishing his ornithological work in Proceedings of the Royal Zoological Society, initially in an English mingled with Spanish idioms. He had a special love of Patagonia.

Hudson settled in England during 1874, taking up residence at St Luke's Road in Bayswater. He produced a series of ornithological studies, including Argentine Ornithology (1888–1899) and British Birds (1895), and later achieved fame with his books on the English countryside, including Hampshire Days (1903), Afoot in England (1909) and A Shepherd's Life (1910), which helped foster the back-to-nature movement of the 1920s and 1930s. The last-mentioned was set in Wiltshire and inspired James Rebanks' 2015 book The Shepherd's Life about a Lake District farmer. {{p.115:"But even more than Orwell or Hemingway, W.H. Hudson turned me into a book obsessive ..." p.114: "One day, I pulled "A Shepherd's Life by W.H. Hudson from the bookcase ...and the sudden life-changing realization it gave me that we could be in books - great books."

Hudson was an advocate of Lamarckian evolution. He was a critic of Darwinism and defended vitalism. He was influenced by the non-Darwinian evolutionary writings of Samuel Butler. He was a founding member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Hudson's best-known novel is Green Mansions (1904), and his best-known non-fiction is Far Away and Long Ago (1918), which was made into a film. Ernest Hemingway referred to Hudson's The Purple Land (1885) in his novel The Sun Also Rises, and to Far Away and Long Ago in his posthumous novel The Garden of Eden (1986).

In Argentina, Hudson is considered to belong to the national literature as Guillermo Enrique Hudson, the Spanish version of his name. A town in Berazategui Partido and several other public places and institutions are named after him.

In 1876 he married Emily Wingrave in London. Hudson was a friend of the late nineteenth century English author George Gissing, whom he met in 1889. They corresponded up until the latter's death in 1903, occasionally exchanging their publications, discussing literary and scientific matters and commenting on their respective access to books and newspapers, a matter of supreme importance to Gissing. Towards the end of his life, Hudson moved to Worthing in Sussex, England. His grave is in Broadwater and Worthing Cemetery in Worthing.

The town of Hudson in Buenos Aires Province is named for him.

Green Mansions

Foreword

I take up pen for this foreword with the fear of one who knows that he cannot do justice to his subject, and the trembling of one who would not, for a good deal, set down words unpleasing to the eye of him who wrote Green Mansions, The Purple Land, and all those other books which have meant so much to me. For of all living authors — now that Tolstoi has gone I could least dispense with W. H. Hudson. Why do I love his writing so? I think because he is, of living writers that I read, the rarest spirit, and has the clearest gift of conveying to me the nature of that spirit. Writers are to their readers little new worlds to be explored; and each traveller in the realms of literature must needs have a favourite hunting-ground, which, in his good will — or perhaps merely in his egoism — he would wish others to share with him.

The great and abiding misfortunes of most of us writers are twofold: We are, as worlds, rather common tramping-ground for our readers, rather tame territory; and as guides and dragomans thereto we are too superficial, lacking clear intimacy of expression; in fact — like guide or dragoman — we cannot let folk into the real secrets, or show them the spirit, of the land.

Now, Hudson, whether in a pure romance like this Green Mansions, or in that romantic piece of realism The Purple Land, or in books like Idle Days in Patagonia, Afoot in England, The Land’s End, Adventures among Birds, A Shepherd’s Life, and all his other nomadic records of

communings with men, birds, beasts, and Nature, has a supreme gift of disclosing not only the thing he sees but the spirit of his vision. Without apparent effort he takes you with him into a rare, free, natural world, and always you are refreshed, stimulated, enlarged, by going there.

He is of course a distinguished naturalist, probably the most acute, broad-minded, and understanding observer of Nature living. And this, in an age of specialism, which loves to put men into pigeonholes and label them, has been a misfortune to the reading public, who seeing the label Naturalist, pass on, and take down the nearest novel. Hudson has indeed the gifts and knowledge of a Naturalist, but that is a mere fraction of his value and interest. A really great writer such as this is no more to be circumscribed by a single word than America by the part of it called New York. The expert knowledge which Hudson has of Nature gives to all his work backbone and surety of fibre, and to his sense of beauty an intimate actuality. But his real eminence and extraordinary attraction lie in his spirit and philosophy. We feel from his writings that he is nearer to Nature than other men, and yet more truly civilized. The competitive, towny culture, the queer up-to-date commercial knowingness with which we are so busy coating ourselves simply will not stick to him. A passage in his Hampshire Days describes him better than I can: “The blue sky, the brown soil beneath, the grass, the trees, the animals, the wind, and rain, and stars are never strange to me; for I am in and of and am one with them; and my flesh and the soil are one, and the heat in my blood and in the sunshine are one, and the winds and the tempests and my passions are one. I feel the ‘strangeness’ only with regard to my fellow men, especially in towns, where they exist in conditions unnatural to me, but congenial to them. . . . In such moments we sometimes feel a kinship with, and are strangely drawn to, the dead, who were not as these; the long, long dead, the men who knew

not life in towns, and felt no strangeness in sun and wind and rain.” This unspoiled unity with Nature pervades all his writings; they are remote from the fret and dust and pettiness of town life; they are large, direct, free. It is not quite simplicity, for the mind of this writer is subtle and fastidious, sensitive to each motion of natural and human life; but his sensitiveness is somehow different from, almost inimical to, that of us others, who sit indoors and dip our pens in shades of feeling. Hudson’s fancy is akin to the flight of the birds that are his special loves — it never seems to have entered a house, but since birth to have been roaming the air, in rain and sun, or visiting the trees and the grass. I not only disbelieve utterly, but intensely dislike, the doctrine of metempsychosis, which, if I understand it aright, seems the negation of the creative impulse, an apotheosis of staleness — nothing quite new in the world, never anything quite new — not even the soul of a baby; and so I am not prepared to entertain the whim that a bird was one of his remote incarnations; still, in sweep of wing, quickness of eye, and natural sweet strength of song he is not unlike a super-bird — which is a horrid image. And that reminds me: This, after all, is a foreword to Green Mansions — the romance of the bird-girl Rima — a story actual yet fantastic, which immortalizes, I think, as passionate a love of all beautiful things as ever was in the heart of man. Somewhere Hudson says: “The sense of the beautiful is God’s best gift to the human soul.” So it is: and to pass that gift on to others, in such measure as herein is expressed, must surely have been happiness to him who wrote Green Mansions. In form and spirit the book is unique, a simple romantic narrative transmuted by sheer glow of beauty into a prose poem. Without ever departing from its quality of a tale, it symbolizes the yearning of the human soul for the attainment of perfect love and beauty in this life — that impossible perfection which we must all learn to see fall from its high tree and be consumed in the flames, as was

Rima the bird-girl, but whose fine white ashes we gather that they may be mingled at last with our own, when we too have been refined by the fire of death’s resignation. The book is soaked through and through with a strange beauty. I will not go on singing its praises, or trying to make it understood, because I have other words to say of its author.

Do we realize how far our town life and culture have got away from things that really matter; how instead of making civilization our handmaid to freedom we have set her heel on our necks, and under it bite dust all the time? Hudson, whether he knows it or not, is now the chief standard-bearer of another faith. Thus he spake in The Purple Land: “Ah, yes, we are all vainly seeking after happiness in the wrong way. It was with us once and ours, but we despised it, for it was only the old common happiness which Nature gives to all her children, and we went away from it in search of another grander kind of happiness which some dreamer — Bacon or another — assured us we should find. We had only to conquer Nature, find out her secrets, make her our obedient slave, then the Earth would be Eden, and every man Adam and every woman Eve. We are still marching bravely on, conquering Nature, but how weary and sad we are getting! The old joy in life and gaiety of heart have vanished, though we do sometimes pause for a few moments in our long forced march to watch the labours of some pale mechanician, seeking after perpetual motion, and indulge in a little, dry, cackling laugh at his expense.” And again: “For here the religion that languishes in crowded cities or steals shamefaced to hide itself in dim churches flourishes greatly, filling the soul with a solemn joy. Face to face with Nature on the vast hills at eventide, who does not feel himself near to the Unseen?

“Out of his heart God shall not pass

His image stamped is on every grass.”

All Hudson’s books breathe this spirit of revolt against our new enslavement by towns and machinery, and are true oases in an age so dreadfully resigned to the “pale mechanician.”

But Hudson is not, as Tolstoi was, a conscious prophet; his spirit is freer, more willful, whimsical — almost perverse — and far more steeped in love of beauty. If you called him a prophet he would stamp his foot at you — as he will at me if he reads these words; but his voice is prophetic, for all that, crying in a wilderness, out of which, at the call, will spring up roses here and there, and the sweet-smelling grass. I would that every man, woman, and child in England were made to read him; and I would that you in America would take him to heart. He is a tonic, a deep refreshing drink, with a strange and wonderful flavour; he is a mine of new interests, and ways of thought instinctively right. As a simple narrator he is well-nigh unsurpassed; as a stylist he has few, if any, living equals. And in all his work there is an indefinable freedom from any thought of after — benefit —— even from the desire that we should read him. He puts down what he sees and feels, out of sheer love of the thing seen, and the emotion felt; the smell of the lamp has not touched a single page that he ever wrote. That alone is a marvel to us who know that to write well, even to write clearly, is a wound business, long to learn, hard to learn, and no gift of the angels. Style should not obtrude between a writer and his reader; it should be servant, not master. To use words so true and simple that they oppose no obstacle to the flow of thought and feeling from mind to mind, and yet by juxtaposition of word-sounds set up in the recipient continuing emotion or gratification — this is the essence of style; and Hudson’s writing has pre-eminently this double quality. From almost any page of his books an example might be taken. Here is one no better than a thousand others, a description of two little girls on a beach: “They

were dressed in black frocks and scarlet blouses, which set off their beautiful small dark faces; their eyes sparkled like black diamonds, and their loose hair was a wonder to see, a black mist or cloud about their heads and necks composed of threads fine as gossamer, blacker than jet and shining like spun glass — hair that looked as if no comb or brush could ever tame its beautiful wildness. And in spirit they were what they seemed: such a wild, joyous, frolicsome spirit, with such grace and fleetness, one does not look for in human beings, but only in birds or in some small bird-like volatile mammal — a squirrel or a spider-monkey of the tropical forest, or the chinchilla of the desolate mountain slopes; the swiftest, wildest, loveliest, most airy, and most vocal of small beauties.” Or this, as the quintessence of a sly remark: “After that Mantel got on to his horse and rode away. It was black and rainy, but he had never needed moon or lantern to find what he sought by night, whether his own house, or a fat cow — also his own, perhaps.” So one might go on quoting felicity for ever from this writer. He seems to touch every string with fresh and uninked fingers; and the secret of his power lies, I suspect, in the fact that his words: “Life being more than all else to me . . .” are so utterly true.

I do not descant on his love for simple folk and simple things, his championship of the weak, and the revolt against the cagings and cruelties of life, whether to men or birds or beasts, that springs out of him as if against his will; because, having spoken of him as one with a vital philosophy or faith, I don’t wish to draw red herrings across the main trail of his worth to the world. His work is a vision of natural beauty and of human life as it might be, quickened and sweetened by the sun and the wind and the rain, and by fellowship with all the other forms of life — the truest vision now being given to us, who are more in want of it than any generation has ever been. A very great writer;

and — to my thinking — the most valuable our age possesses.

John Galsworthy

September 1915 Manaton: Devon

Prologue

It is a cause of very great regret to me that this task has taken so much longer a time than I had expected for its completion. It is now many months — over a year, in fact — since I wrote to Georgetown announcing my intention of publishing, *in a very few months*, the whole truth about Mr. Abel. Hardly less could have been looked for from his nearest friend, and I had hoped that the discussion in the newspapers would have ceased, at all events, until the appearance of the promised book. It has not been so; and at this distance from Guiana I was not aware of how much conjectural matter was being printed week by week in the local press, some of which must have been painful reading to Mr. Abel's friends. A darkened chamber, the existence of which had never been suspected in that familiar house in Main Street, furnished only with an ebony stand on which stood a cinerary urn, its surface ornamented with flower and leaf and thorn, and winding through it all the figure of a serpent; an inscription, too, of seven short words which no one could understand or rightly interpret; and finally the disposal of the mysterious ashes — that was all there was relating to an untold chapter in a man's life for imagination to work on. Let us hope that now, at last, the romance-weaving will come to an end. It was, however, but natural that the keenest curiosity should have been excited; not only because of that peculiar and indescribable charm of the man, which all recognized and which won all hearts, but also because of that hidden chapter — that sojourn in the desert, about which he preserved silence. It was felt in a vague way by his intimates that he had met with unusual experiences which had profoundly affected him and changed the course of his life. To me alone was the truth known, and I must now

tell, briefly as possible, how my great friendship and close intimacy with him came about.

When, in 1887, I arrived in Georgetown to take up an appointment in a public office, I found Mr. Abel an old resident there, a man of means and a favourite in society. Yet he was an alien, a Venezuelan, one of that turbulent people on our border whom the colonists have always looked on as their natural enemies. The story told to me was that about twelve years before that time he had arrived at Georgetown from some remote district in the interior; that he had journeyed alone on foot across half the continent to the coast, and had first appeared among them, a young stranger, penniless, in rags, wasted almost to a skeleton by fever and misery of all kinds, his face blackened by long exposure to sun and wind. Friendless, with but little English, it was a hard struggle for him to live; but he managed somehow, and eventually letters from Caracas informed him that a considerable property of which he had been deprived was once more his own, and he was also invited to return to his country to take his part in the government of the Republic. But Mr. Abel, though young, had already outlived political passions and aspirations, and, apparently, even the love of his country; at all events, he elected to stay where he was — his enemies, he would say smilingly, were his best friends — and one of the first uses he made of his fortune was to buy that house in Main Street which was afterwards like a home to me.

I must state here that my friend’s full name was Abel Guevez de Argensola, but in his early days in Georgetown he was called by his Christian name only, and later he wished to be known simply as “Mr. Abel.”

I had no sooner made his acquaintance than I ceased to wonder at the esteem and even affection with which he, a Venezuelan, was regarded in this British colony. All knew

and liked him, and the reason of it was the personal charm of the man, his kindly disposition, his manner with women, which pleased them and excited no man's jealousy — not even the old hot-tempered planter's, with a very young and pretty and light-headed wife — his love of little children, of all wild creatures, of nature, and of whatsoever was furthest removed from the common material interests and concerns of a purely commercial community. The things which excited other men — politics, sport, and the price of crystals — were outside of his thoughts; and when men had done with them for a season, when like the tempest they had "blown their fill" in office and club-room and house and wanted a change, it was a relief to turn to Mr. Abel and get him to discourse of his world — the world of nature and of the spirit.

It was, all felt, a good thing to have a Mr. Abel in Georgetown. That it was indeed good for me I quickly discovered. I had certainly not expected to meet in such a place with any person to share my tastes — that love of poetry which has been the chief passion and delight of my life; but such a one I had found in Mr. Abel. It surprised me that he, suckled on the literature of Spain, and a reader of only ten or twelve years of English literature, possessed a knowledge of our modern poetry as intimate as my own, and a love of it equally great. This feeling brought us together and made us two — the nervous olive-skinned Hispano–American of the tropics and the phlegmatic blue-eyed Saxon of the cold north — one in spirit and more than brothers. Many were the daylight hours we spent together and "tired the sun with talking"; many, past counting, the precious evenings in that restful house of his where I was an almost daily guest. I had not looked for such happiness; nor, he often said, had he. A result of this intimacy was that the vague idea concerning his hidden past, that some unusual experience had profoundly affected him and perhaps

changed the whole course of his life, did not diminish, but, on the contrary, became accentuated, and was often in my mind. The change in him was almost painful to witness whenever our wandering talk touched on the subject of the aborigines, and of the knowledge he had acquired of their character and languages when living or travelling among them; all that made his conversation most engaging — the lively, curious mind, the wit, the gaiety of spirit tinged with a tender melancholy — appeared to fade out of it; even the expression of his face would change, becoming hard and set, and he would deal you out facts in a dry mechanical way as if reading them in a book. It grieved me to note this, but I dropped no hint of such a feeling, and would never have spoken about it but for a quarrel which came at last to make the one brief solitary break in that close friendship of years. I got into a bad state of health, and Abel was not only much concerned about it, but annoyed, as if I had not treated him well by being ill, and he would even say that I could get well if I wished to. I did not take this seriously, but one morning, when calling to see me at the office, he attacked me in a way that made me downright angry with him. He told me that indolence and the use of stimulants was the cause of my bad health. He spoke in a mocking way, with a presence of not quite meaning it, but the feeling could not be wholly disguised. Stung by his reproaches, I blurted out that he had no right to talk to me, even in fun, in such a way. Yes, he said, getting serious, he had the best right — that of our friendship. He would be no true friend if he kept his peace about such a matter. Then, in my haste, I retorted that to me the friendship between us did not seem so perfect and complete as it did to him. One condition of friendship is that the partners in it should be known to each other. He had had my whole life and mind open to him, to read it as in a book. *His* life was a closed and clasped volume to me.

His face darkened, and after a few moments’ silent reflection he got up and left me with a cold good-bye, and without that hand-grasp which had been customary between us.

After his departure I had the feeling that a great loss, a great calamity, had befallen me, but I was still smarting at his too candid criticism, all the more because in my heart I acknowledged its truth. And that night, lying awake, I repented of the cruel retort I had made, and resolved to ask his forgiveness and leave it to him to determine the question of our future relations. But he was beforehand with me, and with the morning came a letter begging my forgiveness and asking me to go that evening to dine with him.

We were alone, and during dinner and afterwards, when we sat smoking and sipping black coffee in the veranda, we were unusually quiet, even to gravity, which caused the two white-clad servants that waited on us — the brown-faced subtle-eyed old Hindu butler and an almost blue-black young Guiana Negro — to direct many furtive glances at their master’s face. They were accustomed to see him in a more genial mood when he had a friend to dine. To me the change in his manner was not surprising: from the moment of seeing him I had divined that he had determined to open the shut and clasped volume of which I had spoken — that the time had now come for him to speak.

Chapter 1

Now that we are cool, he said, and regret that we hurt each other, I am not sorry that it happened. I deserved your reproach: a hundred times I have wished to tell you the whole story of my travels and adventures among the savages, and one of the reasons which prevented me was the fear that it would have an unfortunate effect on our friendship. That was precious, and I desired above everything to keep it. But I must think no more about that now. I must think only of how I am to tell you my story. I will begin at a time when I was twenty-three. It was early in life to be in the thick of politics, and in trouble to the extent of having to fly my country to save my liberty, perhaps my life.

Every nation, someone remarks, has the government it deserves, and Venezuela certainly has the one it deserves and that suits it best. We call it a republic, not only because it is not one, but also because a thing must have a name; and to have a good name, or a fine name, is very convenient — especially when you want to borrow money. If the Venezuelans, thinly distributed over an area of half a million square miles, mostly illiterate peasants, half-breeds, and indigenes, were educated, intelligent men, zealous only for the public weal, it would be possible for them to have a real republic. They have instead a government by cliques, tempered by revolution; and a very good government it is, in harmony with the physical conditions of the country and the national temperament. Now, it happens that the educated men, representing your higher classes, are so few that there are not many persons unconnected by ties of blood or marriage with prominent members of the political groups to which they belong. By this you will see how easy

and almost inevitable it is that we should become accustomed to look on conspiracy and revolt against the regnant party — the men of another clique — as only in the natural order of things. In the event of failure such outbreaks are punished, but they are not regarded as immoral. On the contrary, men of the highest intelligence and virtue among us are seen taking a leading part in these adventures. Whether such a condition of things is intrinsically wrong or not, or would be wrong in some circumstances and is not wrong, because inevitable, in others, I cannot pretend to decide; and all this tiresome profusion is only to enable you to understand how I— a young man of unblemished character, not a soldier by profession, not ambitious of political distinction, wealthy for that country, popular in society, a lover of social pleasures, of books, of nature actuated, as I believed, by the highest motives, allowed myself to be drawn very readily by friends and relations into a conspiracy to overthrow the government of the moment, with the object of replacing it by more worthy men ourselves, to wit.

Our adventure failed because the authorities got wind of the affair and matters were precipitated. Our leaders at the moment happened to be scattered over the country — some were abroad; and a few hotheaded men of the party, who were in Caracas just then and probably feared arrest, struck a rash blow: the President was attacked in the street and wounded. But the attackers were seized, and some of them shot on the following day. When the news reached me I was at a distance from the capital, staying with a friend on an estate he owned on the River Quebrada Honda, in the State of Guarico, some fifteen to twenty miles from the town of Zaraza. My friend, an officer in the army, was a leader in the conspiracy; and as I was the only son of a man who had been greatly hated by the Minister of War, it became necessary for us both to fly for our lives. In the

circumstances we could not look to be pardoned, even on the score of youth.

Our first decision was to escape to the sea-coast; but as the risk of a journey to La Guayra, or any other port of embarkation on the north side of the country, seemed too great, we made our way in a contrary direction to the Orinoco, and downstream to Angostura. Now, when we had reached this comparatively safe breathing-place — safe, at all events, for the moment — I changed my mind about leaving or attempting to leave the country. Since boyhood I had taken a very peculiar interest in that vast and almost unexplored territory we possess south of the Orinoco, with its countless unmapped rivers and trackless forests; and in its savage inhabitants, with their ancient customs and character, unadulterated by contact with Europeans. To visit this primitive wilderness had been a cherished dream; and I had to some extent even prepared myself for such an adventure by mastering more than one of the Indian dialects of the northern states of Venezuela. And now, finding myself on the south side of our great river, with unlimited time at my disposal, I determined to gratify this wish. My companion took his departure towards the coast, while I set about making preparations and hunting up information from those who had travelled in the interior to trade with the savages. I decided eventually to go back upstream and penetrate to the interior in the western part of Guayana, and the Amazonian territory bordering on Colombia and Brazil, and to return to Angostura in about six months’ time. I had no fear of being arrested in the semi-independent and in most part savage region, as the Guayana authorities concerned themselves little enough about the political upheavals at Caracas.

The first five or six months I spent in Guayana, after leaving the city of refuge, were eventful enough to satisfy a

moderately adventurous spirit. A complaisant government employee at Angostura had provided me with a passport, in which it was set down (for few to read) that my object in visiting the interior was to collect information concerning the native tribes, the vegetable products of the country, and other knowledge which would be of advantage to the Republic; and the authorities were requested to afford me protection and assist me in my pursuits. I ascended the Orinoco, making occasional expeditions to the small Christian settlements in the neighbourhood of the right bank, also to the Indian villages; and travelling in this way, seeing and learning much, in about three months I reached the River Metal During this period I amused myself by keeping a journal, a record of personal adventures, impressions of the country and people, both semi-civilized and savage; and as my journal grew, I began to think that on my return at some future time to Caracas, it might prove useful and interesting to the public, and also procure me fame; which thought proved pleasurable and a great incentive, so that I began to observe things more narrowly and to study expression. But the book was not to be.

From the mouth of the Meta I journeyed on, intending to visit the settlement of Atahapo, where the great River Guaviare, with other rivers, empties itself into the Orinoco. But I was not destined to reach it, for at the small settlement of Manapuri I fell ill of a low fever; and here ended the first half-year of my wanderings, about which no more need be told.

A more miserable place than Manapuri for a man to be ill of a low fever in could not well be imagined. The settlement, composed of mean hovels, with a few large structures of mud, or plastered wattle, thatched with palm leaves, was surrounded by water, marsh, and forest, the breeding-place of myriads of croaking frogs and of clouds of mosquitoes;

even to one in perfect health existence in such a place would have been a burden. The inhabitants mustered about eighty or ninety, mostly Indians of that degenerate class frequently to be met with in small trading outposts. The savages of Guayana are great drinkers, but not drunkards in our sense, since their fermented liquors contain so little alcohol that inordinate quantities must be swallowed to produce intoxication; in the settlements they prefer the white man's more potent poisons, with the result that in a small place like Manapuri one can see enacted, as on a stage, the last act in the great American tragedy. To be succeeded, doubtless, by other and possibly greater tragedies. My thoughts at that period of suffering were pessimistic in the extreme. Sometimes, when the almost continuous rain held up for half a day, I would manage to creep out a short distance; but I was almost past making any exertion, scarcely caring to live, and taking absolutely no interest in the news from Caracas, which reached me at long intervals. At the end of two months, feeling a slight improvement in my health, and with it a returning interest in life and its affairs, it occurred to me to get out my diary and write a brief account of my sojourn at Manapuri. I had placed it for safety in a small deal box, lent to me for the purpose by a Venezuelan trader, an old resident at the settlement, by name Pantaleon — called by all Don Panta — one who openly kept half a dozen Indian wives in his house, and was noted for his dishonesty and greed, but who had proved himself a good friend to me. The box was in a corner of the wretched palm-thatched hovel I inhabited; but on taking it out I discovered that for several weeks the rain had been dripping on it, and that the manuscript was reduced to a sodden pulp. I flung it upon the floor with a curse and threw myself back on my bed with a groan.

In that desponding state I was found by my friend Panta, who was constant in his visits at all hours; and when in

answer to his anxious inquiries I pointed to the pulpy mass on the mud floor, he turned it over with his foot, and then, bursting into a loud laugh, kicked it out, remarking that he had mistaken the object for some unknown reptile that had crawled in out of the rain. He affected to be astonished that I should regret its loss. It was all a true narrative, he exclaimed; if I wished to write a book for the stay-at-homes to read, I could easily invent a thousand lies far more entertaining than any real experiences. He had come to me, he said, to propose something. He had lived twenty years at that place, and had got accustomed to the climate, but it would not do for me to remain any longer if I wished to live. I must go away at once to a different country — to the mountains, where it was open and dry. “And if you want quinine when you are there,” he concluded, “smell the wind when it blows from the south-west, and you will inhale it into your system, fresh from the forest.” When I remarked despondingly that in my condition it would be impossible to quit Manapuri, he went on to say that a small party of Indians was now in the settlement; that they had come, not only to trade, but to visit one of their own tribe, who was his wife, purchased some years ago from her father. “And the money she cost me I have never regretted to this day,” said he, “for she is a good wife not jealous,” he added, with a curse on all the others. These Indians came all the way from the Queneveta mountains, and were of the Maquiritari tribe. He, Panta, and, better still, his good wife would interest them on my behalf, and for a suitable reward they would take me by slow, easy stages to their own country, where I would be treated well and recover my health.

This proposal, after I had considered it well, produced so good an effect on me that I not only gave a glad consent, but, on the following day, I was able to get about and begin the preparations for my journey with some spirit.

In about eight days I bade good-bye to my generous friend Panta, whom I regarded, after having seen much of him, as a kind of savage beast that had sprung on me, not to rend, but to rescue from death; for we know that even cruel savage brutes and evil men have at times sweet, beneficent impulses, during which they act in a way contrary to their natures, like passive agents of some higher power. It was a continual pain to travel in my weak condition, and the patience of my Indians was severely taxed; but they did not forsake me; and at last the entire distance, which I conjectured to be about sixty-five leagues, was accomplished; and at the end I was actually stronger and better in every way than at the start. From this time my progress towards complete recovery was rapid. The air, with or without any medicinal virtue blown from the cinchona trees in the far-off Andean forest, was tonic; and when I took my walks on the hillside above the Indian village, or later when able to climb to the summits, the world as seen from those wild Queneveta mountains had a largeness and varied glory of scenery peculiarly refreshing and delightful to the soul.

With the Maquiritari tribe I passed some weeks, and the sweet sensations of returning health made me happy for a time; but such sensations seldom outlast convalescence. I was no sooner well again than I began to feel a restless spirit stirring in me. The monotony of savage life in this place became intolerable. After my long listless period the reaction had come, and I wished only for action, adventure — no matter how dangerous; and for new scenes, new faces, new dialects. In the end I conceived the idea of going on to the Casiquiare river, where I would find a few small settlements, and perhaps obtain help from the authorities there which would enable me to reach the Rio Negro. For it was now in my mind to follow that river to the Amazons, and so down to Para and the Atlantic coast.

Leaving the Queneveta range, I started with two of the Indians as guides and travelling companions; but their journey ended only half-way to the river I wished to reach; and they left me with some friendly savages living on the Chunapay, a tributary of the Cunucumana, which flows to the Orinoco. Here I had no choice but to wait until an opportunity of attaching myself to some party of travelling Indians going south-west should arrive; for by this time I had expended the whole of my small capital in ornaments and calico brought from Manapuri, so that I could no longer purchase any man's service. And perhaps it will be as well to state at this point just what I possessed. For some time I had worn nothing but sandals to protect my feet; my garments consisted of a single suit, and one flannel shirt, which I washed frequently, going shirtless while it was drying. Fortunately I had an excellent blue cloth cloak, durable and handsome, given to me by a friend at Angostura, whose prophecy on presenting it, that it would outlast *me*, very nearly came true. It served as a covering by night, and to keep a man warm and comfortable when travelling in cold and wet weather no better garment was ever made. I had a revolver and metal cartridge-box in my broad leather belt, also a good hunting-knife with strong buckhorn handle and a heavy blade about nine inches long. In the pocket of my cloak I had a pretty silver tinder-box, and a match-box — to be mentioned again in this narrative

and one or two other trifling objects; these I was determined to keep until they could be kept no longer.

During the tedious interval of waiting on the Chunapay I was told a flattering tale by the village Indians, which eventually caused me to abandon the proposed journey to the Rio Negro. These Indians wore necklets, like nearly all the Guayana savages; but one, I observed, possessed a necklet unlike that of the others, which greatly aroused my curiosity.

It was made of thirteen gold plates, irregular in form, about as broad as a man’s thumb-nail, and linked together with fibres. I was allowed to examine it, and had no doubt that the pieces were of pure gold, beaten flat by the savages. When questioned about it, they said it was originally obtained from the Indians of Parahuari, and Parahuari, they further said, was a mountainous country west of the Orinoco. Every man and woman in that place, they assured me, had such a necklet. This report inflamed my mind to such a degree that I could not rest by night or day for dreaming golden dreams, and considering how to get to that rich district, unknown to civilized men. The Indians gravely shook their heads when I tried to persuade them to take me. They were far enough from the Orinoco, and Parahuari was ten, perhaps fifteen, days’ journey further on — a country unknown to them, where they had no relations.

In spite of difficulties and delays, however, and not without pain and some perilous adventures, I succeeded at last in reaching the upper Orinoco, and, eventually, in crossing to the other side. With my life in my hand I struggled on westward through an unknown difficult country, from Indian village to village, where at any moment I might have been murdered with impunity for the sake of my few belongings. It is hard for me to speak a good word for the Guayana savages; but I must now say this of them, that they not only did me no harm when I was at their mercy during this long journey, but they gave me shelter in their villages, and fed me when I was hungry, and helped me on my way when I could make no return. You must not, however, run away with the idea that there is any sweetness in their disposition, any humane or benevolent instincts such as are found among the civilized nations: far from it. I regard them now, and, fortunately for me, I regarded them then, when, as I have said, I was at their mercy, as beasts of prey, plus a cunning or low kind of intelligence vastly greater than that of the

brute; and, for only morality, that respect for the rights of other members of the same family, or tribe, without which even the rudest communities cannot hold together. How, then, could I do this thing, and dwell and travel freely, without receiving harm, among tribes that have no peace with and no kindly feelings towards the stranger, in a district where the white man is rarely or never seen? Because I knew them so well. Without that knowledge, always available, and an extreme facility in acquiring new dialects, which had increased by practice until it was almost like intuition, I should have fared badly after leaving the Maquiritari tribe. As it was, I had two or three very narrow escapes.

To return from this digression. I looked at last on the famous Parahuari mountains, which, I was greatly surprised to find, were after all nothing but hills, and not very high ones. This, however, did not impress me. The very fact that Parahuari possessed no imposing feature in its scenery seemed rather to prove that it must be rich in gold: how else could its name and the fame of its treasures be familiar to people dwelling so far away as the Cunucumana?

But there was no gold. I searched through the whole range, which was about seven leagues long, and visited the villages, where I talked much with the Indians, interrogating them, and they had no necklets of gold, nor gold in any form; nor had they ever heard of its presence in Parahuari or in any other place known to them.

The very last village where I spoke on the subject of my quest, albeit now without hope, was about a league from the western extremity of the range, in the midst of a high broken country of forest and savannah and many swift streams; near one of these, called the Curicay, the village stood, among low scattered trees — a large building, in which all the people, numbering eighteen, passed most of

their time when not hunting, with two smaller buildings attached to it. The head, or chief, Runi by name, was about fifty years old, a taciturn, finely formed, and somewhat dignified savage, who was either of a sullen disposition or not well pleased at the intrusion of a white man. And for a time I made no attempt to conciliate him. What profit was there in it at all? Even that light mask, which I had worn so long and with such good effect, incommoded me now: I would cast it aside and be myself — silent and sullen as my barbarous host. If any malignant purpose was taking form in his mind, let it, and let him do his worst; for when failure first stares a man in the face, it has so dark and repellent a look that not anything that can be added can make him more miserable; nor has he any apprehension. For weeks I had been searching with eager, feverish eyes in every village, in every rocky crevice, in every noisy mountain streamlet, for the glittering yellow dust I had travelled so far to find. And now all my beautiful dreams — all the pleasure and power to be — had vanished like a mere mirage on the savannah at noon.

It was a day of despair which I spent in this place, sitting all day indoors, for it was raining hard, immersed in my own gloomy thoughts, pretending to doze in my seat, and out of the narrow slits of my half-closed eyes seeing the others, also sitting or moving about, like shadows or people in a dream; and I cared nothing about them, and wished not to seem friendly, even for the sake of the food they might offer me by and by.

Towards evening the rain ceased; and rising up I went out a short distance to the neighbouring stream, where I sat on a stone and, casting off my sandals, raved my bruised feet in the cool running water. The western half of the sky was blue again with that tender lucid blue seen after rain, but the leaves still glittered with water, and the wet trunks looked

almost black under the green foliage. The rare loveliness of the scene touched and lightened my heart. Away back in the east the hills of Parahuari, with the level sun full on them, loomed with a strange glory against the grey rainy clouds drawing off on that side, and their new mystic beauty almost made me forget how these same hills had wearied, and hurt, and mocked me. On that side, also to the north and south, there was open forest, but to the west a different prospect met the eye. Beyond the stream and the strip of verdure that fringed it, and the few scattered dwarf trees growing near its banks, spread a brown savannah sloping upwards to a long, low, rocky ridge, beyond which rose a great solitary hill, or rather mountain, conical in form, and clothed in forest almost to the summit. This was the mountain Ytaioa, the chief landmark in that district. As the sun went down over the ridge, beyond the savannah, the whole western sky changed to a delicate rose colour that had the appearance of rose-coloured smoke blown there by some far off-wind, and left suspended — a thin, brilliant veil showing through it the distant sky beyond, blue and ethereal. Flocks of birds, a kind of troupial, were flying past me overhead, flock succeeding flock, on their way to their roosting-place, uttering as they flew a clear, bell-like chirp; and there was something ethereal too in those drops of melodious sound, which fell into my heart like raindrops falling into a pool to mix their fresh heavenly water with the water of earth.

Doubtless into the turbid tarn of my heart some sacred drops had fallen — from the passing birds, from that crimson disk which had now dropped below the horizon, the darkening hills, the rose and blue of infinite heaven, from the whole visible circle; and I felt purified and had a strange sense and apprehension of a secret innocence and spirituality in nature — a prescience of some bourn, incalculably distant perhaps, to which we are all moving; of