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William H. Edwards

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A Voyage up the River Amazon

William H. Edwards (1822–1909) was an American entomologist and naturalist whose work made a significant contribution to scientific study. First published in 1847, this is Edwards' personal account of his famous expedition to the Amazon basin. It relates his voyage from New York, short residence in the city of Pará and exploration of the local jungle. An expert observer, Edwards describes in fascinating detail the animals, plants and geography of the region, communicating his delight at each discovery. Highlights of the volume include vivid depictions of encounters with anacondas and electric eels, exotic fruits and birds, and observations on the customs of the local Portuguese and native populations. Intended for use by both the naturalist and the general reader, this book will captivate anyone interested in the history of travel and exploration, as well as the development of scientific study in the tropics.

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P R E F A C E.

IN these stirring times, when all Anglo-Saxondom is on the qui-vive for novelty, and the discovery of a new watering-place is hailed with more enthusiasm than the discovery of a new planet,—when the “universal Yankee nation” has so nearly exhausted all the whereabouts which modern facilities for locomotion have brought so conveniently within its reach,—when the Old World has become also an old story, and summer excursions to St. Petersburg and Tornea, and winter sojourns in Australia and Typee, have afforded amusement, not only to travellers themselves, but to those who, at their own fire-sides, like equally well to take a trip to the ends of the earth in their comfortable arm-chairs; it has been a matter of surprise to me, that those who live upon the excitement of seeing and telling some new thing have so seldom betaken themselves to our Southern continent.

Promising indeed to lovers of the marvellous is that land, where the highest of Earth's mountains seek her brightest skies, as though their tall peaks sought a nearer acquaintance with the most glorious of stars; where the mightiest of rivers roll majestically through primeval forests of boundless extent, concealing, yet bringing forth, the most beautiful and varied forms of animal and vegetable existence; where Peruvian gold has tempted, and Amazonian women have repulsed, the unprincipled adventurer; and where Jesuit missionaries, and luckless traders, have fallen victims to cannibal Indians and epicurean anacondas.

With a curiosity excited by such wonders, and heightened

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by the graphic illustrations in school Geographies, where men riding rebellious alligators form a foreground to tigers bounding over tall canes, and huge snakes embrace whole boats' crews in their ample folds, the writer of this unpretending volume, in company with his relative, Amory Edwards, Esq., late U. S. Consul at Buenos Ayres, visited Northern Brazil, and ascended the Amazon to a higher point than, to his knowledge, any American had ever before gone.

As an amusement, and by way of compensation to himself for the absence of some of the monsters which did *not* meet his curious eye, he collected as many specimens in different departments of natural history as were in his power, at the same time chronicling the result of his observations, in the hope that they might not be unacceptable to the naturalist or to the general reader.

To the science of a naturalist he makes no pretensions, but, as a lover and devout worshipper of Nature, he has sought her in some of her most secret hiding-places, and from these comparatively unexplored retreats has brought the little which she deigned to reveal to him.

The country of the Amazon is the garden of the world, possessing every requisite for a vast population and an extended commerce. It is, also, one of the healthiest of regions; and thousands who annually die of diseases incident to the climates of the North might here find health and long life.

If this little book shall contribute to a more general knowledge of the advantages of such a country, the labour of its preparation will be amply repaid.

New York, May, 1847.

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