

THE AMERICAN HUNTER-NATURALIST¹

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IT has been wisely said that the most valuable work done by any individual in a nation, from the standpoint of the nation itself, is apt to be, from that individual's own standpoint, non-remunerative work. The statesmen and soldiers who have really rendered most service to the country were not paid, and indeed, according to our theories, ought not to have been paid, in a way that represented any adequate material reward as compared, for instance, to the sums earned by the most successful business and professional men. Great scientists, great philosophers, great writers, must also get most of their reward from the actual doing of the deed itself; for any pay they receive, measured in money, is of necessity wholly inadequate compared to the worth of the service. Finally, there are certain kinds of work in which the man not merely gets no adequate remuneration, but is obliged to spend far more than he receives, so that he actually pays for the privilege of render-

ing the public a service. This is peculiarly apt to be the case with explorers and with those adventurous naturalists whose love for their pursuit takes them into lands difficult and dangerous of access. From the days of Lewis and Clark to the days of Peary our greatest explorers have not only made no money out of their explorations, but have had to pay heavily for the privilege of doing work of incalculable risk and hardship; and their sufficient reward has been that the result of their work added materially to the record of honorable achievement of the American people.

Mr. Charles Sheldon is a capital representative of the best hunter-naturalist type of to-day. During the century and a half that have elapsed since tranquil Mr. White of Selborne began to correspond with Pennant the love and appreciation of wild things have grown wonderfully. The Gilbert White type of writer and observer has probably reached its highest expression in John Burroughs. But during the last thirty or forty years one of the most interesting developments of this type—foreshadowed in Waterton—has been

¹ *The Wilderness of the Upper Yukon: A Hunter's Explorations for Wild Sheep in Sub-Arctic Mountains*, By Charles Sheldon. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

the wilderness wanderer, who to the hardihood and prowess of the old-time hunter adds the capacity of a first-class field naturalist, and also, what is just as important, the power of literary expression. Such a man can do for the lives of the wild creatures of the wooded and mountainous wilderness what John Muir has done for the physical features of the wilderness; what John Burroughs has done for field and grove and farm-land, and the birds and little beasts that dwell therein. It must always be remembered that in order to make such writings of the highest value they must have the quality of literary interest which we demand in really first-class history and first-class fiction no less than the power of accurate observation and the strict fidelity to truth which the historian must exhibit. Owen Wister's account of his white goat hunting is not only accurate, but is also as amusing and as interesting as his account of the adventures of the Virginian and Linn Maclean and Honey Wiggin, and of what befell the Pilgrim on the Gila, and the story of the worried Territorial officials and competent officers and enlisted men of the regular army who brought about the Second Missouri Compromise.

Exactly as every modern historian now recognizes the elementary fact that history means documents, so the man interested in biology, and especially in the life histories of living creatures—the study of which is certain to receive a constantly increasing appreciation by scientific men—must always remember that observations are useless unless they are written down and ultimately published. It is exasperating to think of certain of our naturalists and hunter-naturalists the value of whose really extraordinary achievements will wholly or in part die with them unless they realize the need of putting them on paper in proper form. Taking him all in all, from the standpoint of field study and closet study, from the standpoint of scientific investigator and of observer in the open, there is no mammalogist in the world who stands quite on a level with Hart Merriam, of the National Museum at Washington. He has written innumerable pamphlets which are excellent in their way, he has done an extraordinary amount of genuine scientific work; but, though there is this sum of real achievement to his credit, it is not a tenth or a twentieth as important as what he could put to his credit—and incidentally to our credit, to the credit of the American people—if only he

would do so; for he could, and ought to, write a work on the mammals of North America which would literally be monumental, which would last indefinitely. He has written such a book about the mammals of the Adirondacks, and, though this book was written many years ago when he was only a young man, it is the best thing of its kind that has ever been done in this country; and it will be a real misfortune if Mr. Merriam does not repeat it on a great scale by writing such a book for all the mammals of the continent north of Mexico, or even including Mexico.

Mr. Shiras and Dr. Abbott are two men with experiences so remarkable that it is really lamentable that they should not understand that in the last analysis all that distinguishes civilization from savagery rests on the written word, and that the lack of will to write is always likely to make even the best work of ephemeral value. Dr. Abbott's feats as a naturalist and explorer in Africa and in Asia have been extraordinary, but they have not been of more than the smallest fraction of the value that they should have been, simply because they have not been recorded. There are very few men alive whose experiences would be of more value than his, if only they were written out. Mr. Shiras has done extraordinary work in the woods with a camera as well as with the notebook. He is a great hunter, but he has finally almost abandoned hunting and become a great field naturalist and observer of wild life. His photographs are extraordinary, his note-books are filled with matter of extraordinary interest; but he will not publish them! He comes out of the wilds and gives his photographs to some daily paper and talks about his experiences to a reporter. He might exactly as well talk about them and show his photographs in a smoking-car, so far as any real value in the way of recording what he has seen is concerned. If he could or would put into book form his experiences, thus preserving his written notes and his pictures, he would render a very real service to the cause of science, he would confer a boon upon lovers of nature; and, unless he does so, his experiences will really amount to very little excepting in so far as they have given him personal gratification.

Mr. Sheldon has now for many years hunted in the wilderness, and most carefully studied in a state of nature at first hand the wild animals of this continent which are best

worth studying. He is a hardy and adventurous hunter and a trained faunal naturalist. What he has to say is of high value, and he has the power so to say it as to bring out this value to the full. This is only the first of the books which we have a right to expect from him. His experiences in Alaska, and indeed in the entire Northwest, are such as no other man has had; and no other writer on the subject has ever possessed both his power of observation and his power of recording vividly and accurately what he has seen. The present volume is fascinating reading from every standpoint. It is all good, from the dedication to the illustrations. The dedication is to one of the best outdoor and indoor naturalists in America, Mr. Edward W. Nelson, and it is phrased so as to show a genuine appreciation of Mr. Nelson's services; and the illustrations include capital photographs and some good reproductions of the striking animal paintings of the animal artist Carl Rungius.

Mr. Sheldon is not only a first-class hunter and naturalist but passionately devoted to all that is beautiful in nature, and he has the literary taste and ability to etch his landscapes into his narratives, so that they give to the reader something of the feeling that he must have had when he saw them—and that this is no mean feat is evident to every one who realizes how uncommonly dreary most writing about landscape is, for the average writer either treats the matter with utter bareness, or, what is worse, indulges at much length in "fine writing" of the abhorrently florid and prolix type.

Mr. Sheldon hunted in the tremendous Northern wilderness of snow-field and torrent, of scalped mountain and frowning pine forest; and in all the world there is no scenery grander in its lonely desolation than that which he portrays. He is no holiday hunter. Like Stewart Edward White, he is as skillful and self-reliant a woodsman and mountaineer as an old-time trapper, and he always hunts alone. The chase of the Northern mountain sheep, followed in such manner, means a test of every real hunter's quality—marksmanship, hardihood and endurance, nerve and skill as a cragsman, keen eyesight, and high ability as still hunter and stalker. Mr. Sheldon possesses them all. Leaving camp by himself, with a couple of crackers and a piece of chocolate and perhaps a little tea in his pocket, he would climb the mountains until at last he saw his game;

and then might have to spend twenty-four hours in the approach, sleeping out overnight and not returning to camp until late the following evening, when he would stagger downhill through the long sub-arctic dusk with the head, hide, and some of the meat of his game on his back. This kind of hunting is the kind that really speaks well for the hunter's bodily prowess and moral qualities.

But the most important part of Mr. Sheldon's book is that which relates not to hunting but to natural history. No professional biologist has worked out the problems connected with these Northern mountain sheep as he has done. He shows that they are of one species; a showing that would have been most unexpected a few years ago, for at one extreme this species becomes the black so-called Stone's sheep, and at the other the pure white, so-called Dall's sheep. Yet, as Mr. Sheldon shows in his maps, his description, and his figures, the two kinds grade into one another without a break, the form midway between having already been described as Fannin's sheep. The working out of this fact is a matter of note. But still more notable is his description of the life history of the sheep from the standpoint of its relations with its foes—the wolf, lynx, wolverine, and war eagle.

A very interesting side of Mr. Sheldon's study is his careful examination of the actual facts as to the methods of attack upon the sheep by their various foes. Closet theorists, many of them wholly without any knowledge of the actual life histories of the animals they describe, have of recent years carried the doctrine of concealing coloration to a preposterous extreme, and they have applied it to these sheep heedless of the fact that one extreme form is black and the other extreme form white, although they are living under practically similar conditions. Mr. Sheldon's first-hand studies in the field show that concealing coloration is a practically negligible factor in the lives of the sheep, that the coloration is of negligible consequence in protecting them from their foes; it is advertising rather than concealing.

In short, this volume is one of the rare volumes which should be in the library of every man who cares for stories of adventure, of every man who cares for natural history and big-game hunting, and, finally, of every man who cares to read of outdoor nature in the wilderness, described with truthfulness, with power, and with charm.