



VOICES IN THE RAIN FOREST

In the wilds of the River Xingu, life can still be very much what it was almost five centuries ago when white men first discovered what they called the New World. In forests, which from an airplane look like a vast green billiard table or an ocean of interwoven tree tops, there are tribes of primitive Indians who live in a jungle world of bows and arrows, paint and feathers, wooden sword-clubs and stone axes, who still make fire by rubbing one stick into another. What we call civilization has made little more than a finger mark on them.

Planes may fly overhead. From time to time the pounding of the diesel engine of a trader's launch navigating a rapids-strewn river or shots from a hunter's rifle may invade the domain of the forest's wild life, but the voice of the rain forest is that of the thunderstorms which may darken the skies on over a hundred

Rain Forest Adventures

days each year, crashing timbers, bird cries, animal calls and the wheeling, whirring, whistling and chirping of insects.

These are the sounds I hear in the jungle which for many years have been home to me and to my family. To the Indians, I am Orat, the nearest they can get to my name. Donna Eva is my wife. Our two children, Jess and Jim, spent their early years in our forest home, though for schooling they had to go to the Mission boarding school in Belem, and then to England.

They are always happy to come “home” to us for their holidays. We ourselves are equally happy to get away from the noisy outside world the moment whatever business takes us to the city can be completed.

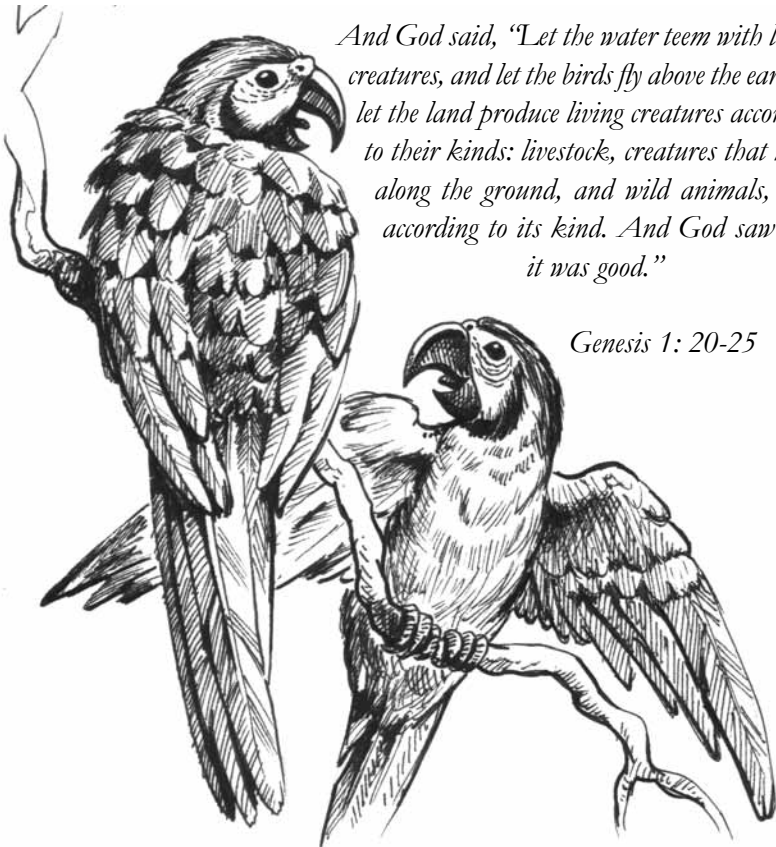
During inevitable periods of waiting in Belem, as we make yearly or half-yearly purchases of stores and equipment or visit doctor or dentist, there is nothing we like better than to slip away for an hour to a small “island” or virgin forest within easy reach of the Mission House and city centre. They are carefully preserved memorials of the time when what is now a marvellous capital city was just as much rain forest as our home on the River Xingu still is. Behind a fringe of giant trees and an undergrowth of ferns and palms, and still within range of the noise of passing traffic, are the Para Botanical and Zoological Gardens. The zoo is not a big one but it is unique in that everything there – animals, birds, reptiles and fish - are native to the forests of the Amazon region.

Crocodiles and boa-constrictors laze in near-natural surroundings. Emus (the South American brand of ostrich) strut around with heads high up in the air and, thanks to the periscope of a neck with which nature has provided them, are able to look down on mere visitors like ourselves. Jaguars growl. Red macaw parrots squawk. Armadillos burrow and anteaters sleep under their blanket-like tails. Giant tortoises share a pen with red deer and grey tapirs. There are playful monkeys which chatter and glum ones which howl – according to their species. Sloths and wild boar, leopard cats and

porcupines, herons and peacocks, cranes and flamingoes, they are all there. Through the glass panels of the aquarium we can see the killer fish we call piranha being fed or watch the electric eels.

Life in the wilds of the River Xingu has given us close-up contacts with many of these jungle creatures in their natural setting, away from all the pens and cages. Not all of them are in the "All things bright and beautiful" class. Some may not even be either "wise or wonderful" at first sight, but we have lived long enough to see that everything has its purpose.

"Ask the beasts and they shall teach thee," wrote the observant Job. Following his wise and ancient advice, we have kept eyes and ears open and seek to pass on some of what we have learned.



And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth ... let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good."

Genesis 1: 20-25