

*Rio Negro.*  
**WHY NOT BRITISH GUIANA?**  
*Aug. 27th. 1906*

**FIVE ACRES FOR HALF-A-CROWN.**

(By Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace.)

Under this heading two of your correspondents have referred to a passage in my "Travels on the Amazon" (pp. 230-33), in which I describe how a few families of workers might live in certain districts on this river in comfort and even luxury by their own labour. But, to avoid misconception, I think it is necessary for me to say a few words in explanation. In the first place I premise that there must be some half-dozen industrious, fairly-educated working men and boys, and that they must have a clear capital of £50 to tide them over the first year or two.

While not withdrawing one word of what I have there said, I did not, and do not now, put it forward as a means of coping with unemployment and poverty at home. For that purpose, I entirely agree with such of your correspondents as claim that the only immediate and effective remedy is to be found in the various forms of co-operative land cultivation. To those who wish to have some details as to how this is to be practically carried out, I will refer to my chapter upon "Reoccupation of the land: the only immediate solution of the problem of the unemployed," first published in "Forecasts of the Coming Century" (1897), and reissued in Vol. II. of my "Studies, Scientific and Social."

Recurring to my remarks upon the Rio Negro, I wish to point out that the essential feature of my suggestion has been overlooked by Mr. H. H. Smith (in his volume on "Brazil, the Amazon, and the Coast"), who adduces the case of a very industrious German family, settled in the forest a few miles inland from Santarem, on the Amazon, who had encountered numerous difficulties and were quite unable, after several years' hard work, to make a tolerable living. But in this case, as in almost all the other cases of European settlers in Brazil and other tropical regions, failure arises from the fact that they all try to grow produce to sell, instead of for their own consumption, while they buy the necessaries of life at the nearest town. Thus, whether they grow coffee or tobacco, sugar or cocoa, or any other tropical produce, they have to sell it to merchants or middlemen at very low rates, in competition with the large estates which grow a hundred or a thousand times the quantity; while all they buy is in small quantities from the retail traders. They thus sell cheap and buy dear, and being obliged to sell, however adverse the market may be, they often suffer great loss and are unable to procure even the ordinary necessaries of life.

Even less labour than that spent in growing and marketing a crop for sale would suffice to produce all the necessaries of life in abundance after the first year, while in succeeding years more and more of the comforts, and even the luxuries, of life could also be produced. There would, however, be always a sufficient surplus of fruits, vegetables, poultry, etc., to sell at good prices to passing boats, or to exchange for the few tools or utensils that cannot be made at home. The great economies of this mode of procedure are pointed out in my article already referred to, while the variety of necessaries and luxuries that can be easily grown in the most favoured parts of the tropics are indicated in the passage of my book on the Amazon which your correspondents have noticed.

I would like to add here that I should not now recommend Englishmen to go to the Amazon or Rio Negro to try such a self-supporting life among people of a different language and religion, and where their very success might subject them to excessive Government exactions. The experiment might be tried, however, in British Guiana, in an almost identical climate, and with even greater chances of success. In that Colony a genuine settler can have five acres of unoccupied land (comprising almost the whole of the interior forests) for the small sum of half-a-crown, the sole condition being to reside on it for ten years; while any larger amount up to 250 acres can be purchased at a total cost of about 2s. an acre. On any of the numerous rivers that intersect these forests—the Demerara, the Berbice, and the Essequibo, with its many large tributaries—there are doubtless hundreds of localities equally favourable to the settler with those I have described on the Rio Negro, while, as these rivers are all traversed by steamers communicating with the mines and inland settlements, there would be easy communication with the seaports, and a ready market for all surplus produce.

For healthy and hard-working men, with a small capital, who wish to form permanent self-supporting homes, under the most favourable conditions and in an easily accessible country, I do not know of any more suitable Colony than British Guiana.

*This was much nearer the  
"Here they" - Why not the Rio Negro.*