

The sea is usually so rough around Ascension that a sort of crane is provided at the landing steps with a hanging rope, by which those wishing to land can swing themselves on shore from a boat when it is too rough for the boat to come close to the steps.

Land Crabs swarm all over this barren and parched volcanic islet. They go down to the sea in the breeding season; they climb up to the top of Green Mountain, and the larger ones steal the young Rabbits from their holes and devour them. It always seems strange to an English naturalist to see Crabs walking about at their ease high up in the mountains, although the occurrence is common enough and not confined to the tropics: in Japan a Crab is to be met with walking about on the mountain highroads far inland, at a height of several thousand feet, as much at home there as a Beetle or a Spider, and Crabs of the same genus (*Thelphusa*) live inland on the borders of streams in Greece and Italy.

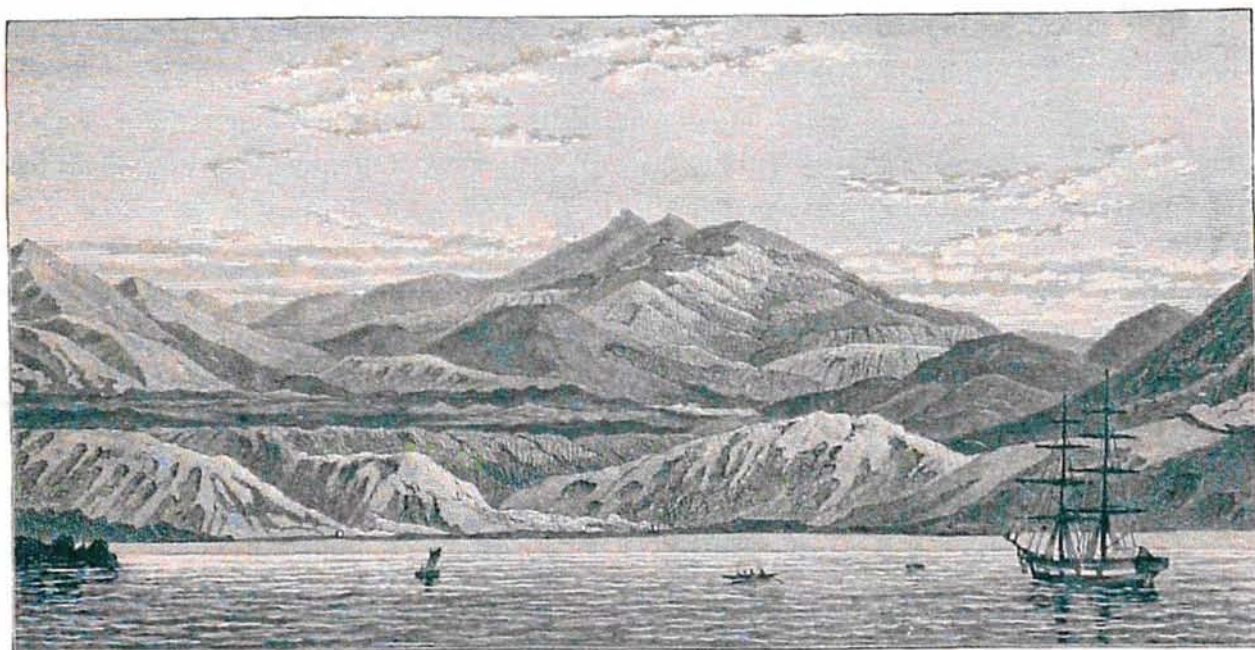


FIG. 331.—The Green Mountain and Extinct Craters. Ascension Island.

Close to the dockyard is the Turtle Pond, in which there were over a hundred Turtles at the time of the ship's visit. At the side of the pond an enclosed area of sand is provided, in which the Turtles dig great holes, large enough to bury themselves in, laying their eggs at the bottom of them; some were still laying, but a good many lots of eggs were beginning to hatch out. The eggs have a flexible leathery shell, and are rather smaller than a billiard ball, and of the same shape. The fresh-laid egg is never quite full so that there is always a slight fold or wrinkle in the yielding shell, and the seamen sometimes puzzle themselves by trying to squeeze the egg so as to get the dint out, but it always forms in a fresh place notwithstanding their efforts. When the eggs are near the time of hatching the depression has quite disappeared from the shell, which has become tense, no doubt, from the development of small quantities of gas within.