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EMBASSY TO CHINA.

CHAPTER I.

DEPARTURE FROM PORTSMOUTH.

At three o'clock of the afternoon of February 8th, 1816, I embarked with His Excellency Lord Amherst, on board H. M. S. Alceste, then lying at Spithead. Getting under weigh at eight o'clock the following morning, in company with H. M. S. Lyra, Capt. B. Hall, and General Hewitt, Capt. Campbell, we steered with a fine breeze through the Needles. In passing the shores of the Isle of Wight, my imagination dwelt painfully on its white cliffs and verdant slopes, which but three days before I had visited with friends who gave the best value to my existence, and from whom I was separating, perhaps for ever. But the painful feelings excited by such reflections, too intense, indeed, for long continuance, were quickly destroyed by my share of the bodily suffering which attacked, in succession, the greater number of those, who then, for the first time, felt the motion of a ship at sea. Scarcely had we cleared the western extremity of the island, when an intolerable giddiness, languor, and sickness, drove me to my cot, and had but slightly mitigated, when the mountains of Madeira were descried from the ship.

Early in the morning of the 18th February, going upon deck, I saw this interesting island bearing S. S. W., distant about six leagues.

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A thick white cloud covered its mountains, which gradually dissipating as we advanced, disclosed their snowy summits beautifully contrasting with the dark foliage of their declivities. The squadron hove to about ten o'clock in the forenoon, off the town of Funchal, at the distance of two or three leagues from the land.

Having prepared every thing for collecting objects of natural history, I waited impatiently for the appearance of a boat, to carry me to the fulfilment of my anticipations. Examining with my glass the aspect of the rugged shores, I exulted in the geological interest of their appearance, and collected, in imagination, plants which, from number and rarity, would give a long and delightful employment. What then was my disappointment, when I was informed by His Excellency, that he wished no one to leave the ship, lest any chance of delay should arise to the sailing of the Alceste, as soon as she had obtained the necessary supplies. As Lord Amherst denied himself, for public reasons, the pleasure which he much desired, of visiting the island, no one of his suite had a shadow of right to remonstrate, and I prepared to suffer my disappointment with all possible patience. After the lapse, however, of two or three hours, Capt. Campbell, of the General Hewitt, came on board, and offered to take me on shore; and, being almost immediately to return, I readily accompanied him.

On approaching the beach, where I had hoped to find some specimens of sea-weed, I found the depth of water up to the shore so great, that a vessel might almost anchor with her bowsprit over the land, and consequently, that no marine production was to be met with. The beach is made up of large rounded fragments of lava, generally of a vesicular structure, very ponderous, and of a bluish colour. Landing to the westward of the town, I found a mountain torrent, having its bed sides formed of huge masses of volcanic matter, as far as the eye could follow its romantic windings. I entered its bed in search of plants, but found very few, as the apprehension of losing my chance of returning to the ship prevented my looking very narrowly. The Fumaria Parviflora, which was growing in great

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abundance in all the crevices of the rocks, and a few geraniums, ferns, and mosses, composed my collection.

Not finding the boat in readiness on my return to the beach, I walked into the town, which I entered under an archway that led to a long narrow street very well paved with round pebbles, and perfectly clean, and which was intersected by others of a similar character. The houses are lofty, and completely overshadow the narrow streets, forming an effectual screen against the beams of a hot sun. The softer sex, for here they cannot be called the fair sex, were enjoying the air on virandas which projected from the first floor of the better-looking houses, and were enabled by the narrowness of the streets to converse freely with their opposite neighbours. The young ladies of Madeira, although dark brunettes, possess many charms. Their hair, and arching eye-brows, are of a jet black, and their eyes sparkle under lashes of the same colour; their face is oval and expressive, and handsome rather than beautiful.

The streets were filled with foot passengers, of whom no inconsiderable number were priests, in long loose robes, and without hats. They had evidently fared on the fat of the land; and many of them exhibited in their countenances and deportment, a full share of self-satisfaction and self-importance. But the faces of others seemed to be lightened with a paternal feeling, and physiognomists might have traced in them characters of mildness, benignity, and religion. Neither did they all receive the same marks of respect from the passing populace. Sometimes the hat was simply raised, and the body bowed, without any regard being directed to the object of this salute, which was begun and ended at the instant of meeting. In other cases, an eagerness was shown to catch the observation of the Father, long before he approached, while a deprecating and beseeching manner appeared to implore the blessing of a superior being. It was agreeable to the harmony of my own sentiments, that these last attentions were paid to those alone, whose exterior almost incited me to a similar display of respectful feeling.

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On quitting the town, I was disposed to conclude, that it had been much improved since it was visited by its last describers; but as it was Sunday when I was there, and all classes were enjoying the leisure of the day in their best apparel, and as first impressions are frequently erroneous, I shall confine myself to the remark, that what I saw did not correspond with what I had read.

When I reached the Alceste, I found that I might have remained on shore several hours, as some circumstances had occurred, which prevented her immediate sailing; and she did not leave Funchal Roads till the evening, when we got under weigh with a fine breeze.

As we proceeded on our voyage towards the Line, the tedium of our situation was in some measure relieved, by the amusement we derived from observing the habits of the flying-fish, which continually surrounded us. This animal, equally interesting in its structure, and in the circumstances of its persecuted life, has been so often the theme of the traveller's description, that its very mention comes with the heaviness of a twice-told tale. Yet, although its descriptions are numerous, much is still wanting to the completion of its natural history; and it is a subject of regret with naturalists, that its species met with by voyagers, are not ascertainable. For these reasons, and because "nature is an inexhaustible source of investigation," I shall state the few observations which I made on a specimen that was brought me on the morning of the 27th February, when in lat. 10° 38′ N., and 25° 47′ W. long.; and I do this the more readily, as its characters did not entirely accord with the description of any other species.

The colour of its back was a deep blue, which passed on its sides into a yellowish green, terminating in a silvery white, which, near its tail, had a pinkish hue. Several small patches of white reached from above its eye, to the pectoral fin. Its fins were six in number; two pectoral, two ventral, one caudal, and one dorsal. The pectoral fin consisted of fourteen rays, and was five inches in its greatest length, and as much in its greatest width. The two undermost rays, when the wing was expanded, were very short, and scarcely distin-

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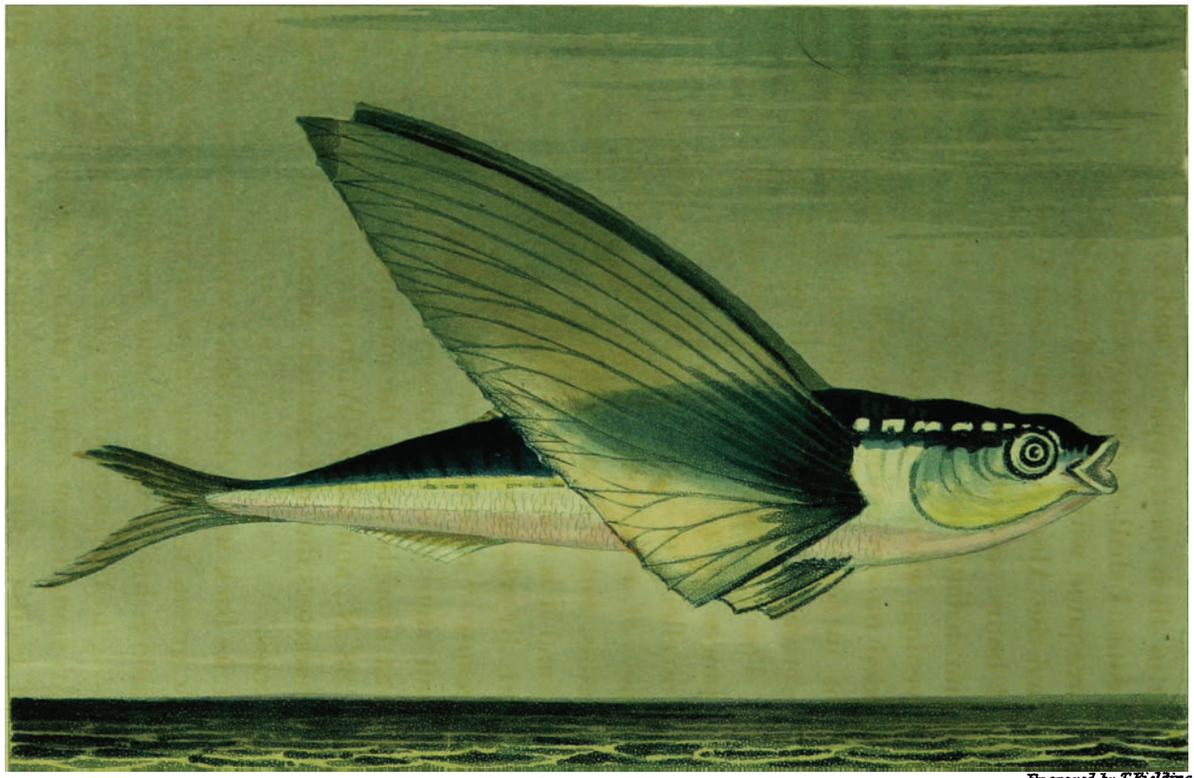

Drawn from a sketch by W. Havell Esq.r

Engraved by T. Fielding.

EXOCOETUS SPLENDENS.

Published by Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, London, Oct.r 1, 1817.

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guishable from those next them, and the uppermost ray was the longest. Each ventral fin consisted of six rays, and was situated immediately behind the insertion of the pectoral fin. The dorsal fin, the rays of which were so indistinct that I cannot venture to state their number, had its origin about two-thirds down the back. The caudal fin was an inch long, and terminated at the setting on of the tail.

From the above description, it will appear that my specimen resembled the Exocætus Volitans in the position of the ventral fins, but differed from it in colour, which in the latter is brownish red on the back. It agreed with Exocœtus Exiliens and Mesogaster, in its general colour, but differed from them in the position of its ventral fins. It was distinguished from them all by the position of its dorsal fins. Should these differences be considered sufficient to establish it as a new species, I would propose to call it Exocœtus * Splendens, from the brilliancy of its colours.

The species which I have just described is furnished with as ample means of supporting itself in air as any of its congeners. Its air-bladder reaches from the pharyngeal bones along the spine to the extremity of its body, occupying eight-tenths of its whole length. The widest part of the air-bladder is situated immediately in front of the pectoral fins, and it tapers gradually towards the tail. It is equal in bulk to about four-tenths of the whole fish.

A particular purpose seems to be answered by the greater dimension of the air-bladder near the head, namely, the compensation of the great gravity of the animal at this part in consequence of its breadth. This compensation is necessary to the support of the animal's body in the air in a favourable position for flight. The situation of the pectoral fins before the centre of gravity in this, as in other flying-fish, also tends to elevate the head, as remarked by Lacépède. †

* If the white spots on its head be peculiar, Exocœtus Maculatus would be a better name.

† Histoire Naturelle des Poissons, vol. v. p. 406. Lacépède has made the situation of

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It has been stated by a naturalist * of the highest eminence, that the pectoral fins of the flying-fish serve only as a parachute, and by another † that "the animal beats the air during the leap, that is, it alternately extends and closes its pectoral fins." With this last observation my own experience perfectly agrees. I have repeatedly seen the motion of the fins during its flight, and as flight is only "swimming in air," it appears natural that these organs should be used in the same manner in both elements. The flying-fish is also much nearer in conformation to the bat, which supports itself in the air by repeated percussion, than to the flying squirrel, and other animals, whose structure only enables them to fall slowly. I may also remark, that when the fin of the flying-fish expands, its rays do not open in the same line, but describing a curve strike the air with repeated impulses.

I found it impossible to satisfy my mind with any probable conjecture respecting the greatest space through which these fish can support themselves in air, but I have seen them fly without once touching the water for fifty seconds, and my eye could not follow them till they fell. I have little doubt that they take to the air, as well for pleasure as to escape their enemies, since they were often seen rising about the ship in all directions, when no foe was visibly near, and when they had not been disturbed by the ship's motion through the water. Indeed I have been disposed to think myself unfortunate in not witnessing, during the whole voyage, a single flying-fish taken by a frigate-bird, or dorado; and I therefore venture to hope that these poor animals are not so persecuted a race as travellers have been led to imagine.

It is impossible to reflect on the habits of the flying-fish without considering its power of respiring in air. In treating of the respir-

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the dorsal fin opposite to the anal fin an essential character of the genus Exocœtus. Is it a universal character, or is the situation of the dorsal fin in my specimen a mere exception to a general law?

* Cuvier, Règne Animal, tom. ii. p. 188.

† Humboldt, Personal Narrative, vol. ii. p. 14.

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ation of fishes, the possibility of their air-bladder acting subsidiarily to the branchiæ, has not passed unnoticed by authors; but I am not aware that this organ in the flying-fish has been pointed out as likely to assist the respiration of that animal out of the water. And yet I had once flattered myself with the belief that I had discovered its communication with the mouth under such circumstances of organisation as precluded any doubt of its aiding the function of aerial respiration. But I had only one opportunity of dissecting the animal when recently taken, and I dare not trust to a single observation. I would recommend however those, whose opportunities are frequent of possessing the flying-fish soon after death, to examine attentively the termination of its air-bladder at the pharyngeal bones. These bones, in all other fish * which I have examined, are two in number, and much apart, their office being to assist deglutition and to shield the blood-vessels which ramify under them on their way to the branchiæ. In the flying-fish their number and position is different, allowing the inference that their function is also different. They are in this animal four in number, two large and two small. The two former in close apposition are situated immediately above and behind the anterior orifice of the œsophagus, and are compressed by the latter, which are united to them by a strong elastic membrane. Muscles are attached to the larger bones so as to separate them by their contraction. The anterior termination of the air-bladder is at the posterior portion of the larger bones. The question to be determined is, whether the air-bladder has an orifice at this part, which is opened and closed by the separation and re-union of the pharyngeal bones.

On the evening of the 4th March we passed the line, and on the following morning shortened sail, to pay the usual homage to Neptune, which being accomplished we proceeded on our voyage.

* Since my return I have examined a specimen of the Exocœtus Mesogaster, preserved in spirit, in which the two large bones were united, but there was an orifice between them and the small ones; whether it led into the air-bladder or not I was unable to determine. The same specimen had only eight, instead of ten, rays to its branchiæ.

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On the 10th, being in 10° 39′ S. Lat., and 32° 47′ W. Long., the Alceste parted company from the Lyra and General Hewitt, which shaped their course for the Cape, whilst the former steered for the harbour of Rio de Janeiro. On the 20th, we were off Cape Frio, and all those who had never before visited the shores of South America anxiously speculated on the scenes they were about to witness in the New World.

The affections of different minds on first approaching an interesting coast, might form a subject of curious and instructive speculation. When the land indeed appears but as a dark undefined speck in the distant horizon, first reflections cannot widely differ, although their vividness may depend on the sensibility of the individual, and their extensiveness on the number of his associations. But few educated men will approach a country for the first time of their lives, without reverting to the history of its conquest or discovery. On making the coast of the New World, so interesting in the history of man and of the earth, every thought must centre in Columbus. All the circumstances of his situation on the day of his discovery, all the attributes of his mind, and all the heroism of his conduct, array themselves in the imagination. But as the land developes itself, as its larger features become visible, speculation is extinguished in a general glow of undefined but delightful feeling. Never can I forget the pleasing, yet almost awful emotion of my mind, when rising early in the morning I first beheld the shores of South America expanded before me. To describe the scenery by words would be a vain attempt; the pencil of a painter enthusiastic in genius and in feeling, could alone convey to those who have never beheld it an imperfect apprehension of its grandeur.

As objects become still more defined and palpable, various trains of thought arise in different characters. In the commander of a British ship of war, the hope of finding refreshments for his crew, of meeting old friends, of carrying his ship into port in a skilful and gallant style, and of supporting the proud pre-

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eminence of his flag, is perhaps on ordinary occasions the leading sentiment of his mind. — In many of his officers, an escape from subordination to the independence of a rove on shore, with all the importance really and in imagination attached to the character of a British naval officer, may be the chief pleasurable expectation. In one or two of them, indeed, very different feelings may arise. Habit sometimes acts so powerfully on a seaman's nature, that all his pleasing associations are of a nautical character, and whatever interrupts their train is to him a positive evil. To such a character the appearance of land, so dear to others, brings with it no pleasing emotion, and is irksome in proportion to his chances of delay. — The professor, or admirer of the pictorial art, dwells on the exterior characters of the scene, collects all the great traits by which a sublime picture is formed, and anticipates the interior beauties of the country of which he contemplates the outline. — The speculator on human character, varied by the modifying influence of climate, religion, and government, takes his own species as the subject of his examination. As the inhabitants of different classes appear, he combines them in an imaginary society, owing its character to his previous conclusions, but which he expects will be found consistent with reality. — Over all these, the naturalist has many advantages both with respect to pleasurable expectation and the chances of its fulfilment. The objects of his studies are infinitely numerous, and each in its simple relations is so completely a centre of observation, that he must always be repaid for the labour of research. On first entering the harbour of Rio Janeiro, he feels unutterable delight. No apprehension of disappointment darkens his prospect. The certainty of meeting Nature in her gayest and most exalted colours, in all her varied and attracted forms, gives him unmixed enjoyment. The brilliant tints of the mountain foliage feed his botanical imagination, whilst the dazzling insects which flutter about the ship tell to him the stores of animated nature. As a geologist, he may almost remain on the deck of the vessel and pro-

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secute his labours. Immense ridges of primitive mountains, traversed by deep ravines, and rising in succession to the very boundary of his vision, afford him an ample subject of interesting investigation.

Long before the Alceste reached her anchorage, the firing of cannon at regular intervals announced the occurrence of some great public event, and as soon as we communicated with other ships in the harbour, we were informed of the death of the Queen of Portugal. Vessels of all nations that were at this time lying off St. Sebastian, showed their respect to the King of Portugal by crossing their yards, hoisting flags half mast high, and firing guns every five minutes. The Alceste followed their example; and as a farther mark of respect, the British Ambassador determined to appear on shore with some outward badge of mourning, and requested the gentlemen of his suite to do the same.

It was the afternoon before we anchored, and dark before I could gratify my impatience to visit the shore. The city of St. Sebastian has undergone so little alteration since it was described by Mr. Barrow, that any account of it which I could give from my limited means of observation would be superfluous. The darkness of the night prevented my seeing much of the inhabitants, but those who did fall under my passing notice were priests riding in their carriages, friars in procession, and ladies peeping from latticed doors. In company with some friends I hastened to the Caza de Pasto in the Rua D'Alfandaga, the best English hotel in the place, which, although it did not possess the comforts of a similar establishment at home, afforded no ordinary fare, and very civil treatment made us less fastidious respecting our entertainment. Having partaken of a supper at which we were supplied with tolerable claret at three shillings a bottle, we enquired for beds. The house contained no distinct bed-rooms and but few beds; but in a large billiard-room, with the assistance of the billiard-table, chairs, and sofas, our party, though numerous, mustered a sufficient number of separate resting places. The dread of musquitoes, the scourge of Europeans in hot

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