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978-1-108-05051-7 - Narrative of an Expedition to Explore the River Zaire in South Africa in 1816

James Hingston Tuckey and Christen Smith

Excerpt

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NARRATIVE OF AN EXPEDITION
TO EXPLORE
THE RIVER ZAIRE.

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CHAPTER I.



Passage to, and Notices on, the Island of Saint Jago.

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NARRATIVE, &c.

CHAPTER I.

THE provisions and stores for the expedition having been all shipped on board the Congo, and the Dorothy transport, and the river being free from the ice, which had blocked it up for many days, the two vessels quitted Deptford on the 16th of February, and proceeded to the Nore, where the Congo's crew received six months wages in advance ; and on the following morning (25th) we weighed and anchored the same evening in the Downs, where we were detained until the 28th by strong westerly winds. On that day, the wind being at N.N.W., we put to sea, but returning to S.W. when

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abreast of Plymouth, we were obliged to run into the Sound, where we lay for three days, perfectly sheltered by the Breakwater from the violence of a S.W. gale. Here we completed the Congo's complement, by receiving two marines, and entering two seamen, in lieu of as many who had deserted at Sheerness the same evening on which they received their advance.

On the 5th of March, the wind moderating, though still at S.W., we put to sea in the hope of being able to beat down the Channel; but the return of strong gales forced us into Falmouth on the 6th, from whence we again sailed on the 9th, with a fine breeze at N.N.E.; this, however, failed us on reaching the length of Scilly, and was succeeded by a heavy gale from S.W., with extremely thick and dirty weather, such as, at this season, renders the navigation of the English channel equally disagreeable and dangerous, and which now, by preventing our getting a pilot for Scilly, obliged us to run back to Falmouth. In standing in for Scilly, we passed the Bishop and Clerk's rocks at the distance of a mile, the sea breaking on them in a frightful manner; we also passed close to the Wolf rock, on which the sea also broke furiously, but without that roaring noise which gave it its name, and which formerly warned seamen of their danger. On enquiring at Falmouth, I was assured that, some years since,

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the fishermen of Cornwall employed all their boats a whole summer in conveying stones to fill up the chasm or hole that caused this roaring, which, they alleged, frightened the fish to a great distance.

During a tedious detention of eight days at Falmouth, the winds fluctuated every moment in hard squalls, from W. S. W. to N. W., with heavy showers of rain, snow, and hail; effects ascribable probably to the local situation of this harbour, which, being placed nearly at the narrowest part of the peninsula of Cornwall, and surrounded by high lands, is exposed to the vapours from the Atlantic, and from the English and Irish channels; and these being intercepted and condensed by the hills, produce those frequent squalls and quick succeeding showers.

Falmouth is a neat, clean town, built entirely of stone found on the spot; its market, which is a commodious building of Cornish granite, is exceedingly well supplied with meat, poultry, butter, eggs, and vegetables. The number of meeting-houses indicate the great majority of the inhabitants to be dissenters. The stranger however is most forcibly struck by the strong similarity of features in the Falmouth females, which consists in plump rounded faces, without much expression, but denoting cheerfulness and placidity of disposition, while the bloom of their cheeks

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sufficiently proves that the humidity of the climate is not unhealthy.

The wind at length coming to the north, we weighed once more, (19th) and at last cleared the Channel, passing Scilly at the distance of 15 leagues. On opening the Lizard, we suddenly, from a very smooth water, got into a heavy swell from N.W., with a cross sea; the swell doubtless proceeding from the late westerly gales, and the cross sea from the meeting of the tides of the two channels at the Land's-end, for as we encreased our distance from the land, the waves subsided, and the sea became more regular.

When abreast of Scilly the wind came to the east, and we now found that the transport rolled so heavily going before it, as to be most uncomfortable even to seamen, while the Naturalists became most grievously sea-sick; in order to remedy this rolling, as far as was now possible, all the lumber stowed in the boats and deck was got out of them; but this had little effect, the cause being either in the ship herself, or in some vice in the stowage of the hold, we were therefore obliged to submit to this discomfort, by which we could neither take our meals, sleep, walk the deck, or even sit down to write with any satisfaction.

The common gull (*Larus canus*) was the only bird that

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accompanied us from the Channel, and it did not disappear finally until the 23d, when Cape Finisterre, the nearest land, was 200 miles distant. On the 25th we passed the parallel of this cape, nearly at the same distance.

We now shaped a course for the west end of Madeira, and a pleasant breeze from the N.E. impelling us forward 50 to 60 leagues aday, we made that island at day-light on the 31st, our approach to it on the preceding days being denoted by the wind veering to the west, with frequent squalls and showers of rain, and by the numbers of logger-head turtles (*Testudo caretta*) seen asleep on the surface of the sea. One of these animals was taken up by the Congo with many clusters of barnacles adhering to the shell ; they consisted of two species, the *Lepas anatifera*, and *Lepas membranacea*. The first floating mollusca were also seen on approaching Madeira, and as the scientific gentlemen were now pretty well recovered from their sea sickness, and the weather was warm and fair, Fahrenheit's thermometer at noon being 63°, the tow-net was put overboard, and collected some of these animals, all of the *Vellela* genus.

Passing Madeira to the west at ten leagues distance, we steered for Palma, which, at day-light on the 2d of April, was in sight ; running along its west side at the distance of six leagues, we observed the summit of the Caldera mountain

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patched with snow. In the afternoon we passed along the west side of Ferro, also at the distance of six leagues.

As far as the Canaries our route had been very barren of any event of interest; we saw several vessels, but spoke none. After losing our English gulls, two birds only were seen on the day before making Madeira, the one a large bird resembling a raven, the other an ash coloured gull. This almost total absence of sea birds in the vicinity of Madeira and the Canaries seems the more extraordinary, as it may be supposed that the Dezertas, Salvages, and other rocks would afford them undisturbed breeding places.

After passing Madeira the winds were generally from N.N.E. and N.E., blowing moderately with fair weather; the days rather hazy, but the nights so bright that not a star was hid in the heavens. Our route laying to the eastward of the islands of Cape Verde, the trade wind, as we approached the coast of Africa, lost its steadiness, veering from N.N.E. to N.W.

On the 5th, in latitude 22° , longitude $19^{\circ} 9'$, the sea being much discoloured, we tried for soundings, but did not get bottom with 120 fathoms of line. Cape Cowoeira, the nearest point of Africa, was at this time 32 leagues distant. The atmosphere extremely hazy, and a large flight of fishing-birds was seen; both being indications of