NATURAL HISTORY

OF

THE AZORES.

NARRATIVE.

Early one morning in August 1861 I passed through the Azores, on board the Royal Mail-steamer 'Seine,' on my outward passage from Southampton to the West The sea was perfectly calm; but the atmosphere was dense and oppressive, and heavy clouds rested on the top of Pico. I almost wished I could then have stopped and gone ashore to visit these isolated islands; but onward we went, and by breakfast-time were again out of sight Sombrero, the most eastern of the West-Indian islands next came in view. Several times during my voyage I thought of the Azores, and made up my mind that, should the opportunity offer, I would visit them. I was absent from England some months; and on my return my mind was filled with the wonders of a tropical climate; I had almost forgotten the Azores; and it was not till the spring of 1865 that I was able to carry out this longwished-for project. I was anxious to enjoy their scenery, as well as to investigate their fauna and flora.

The careful researches of Mr. Wollaston and others have brought to light numerous and very interesting forms amongst the Coleoptera of Madeira, the Canaries, and the Cape-Verde Islands. The Azores, however, remained

very imperfectly explored*; and it was with the view of giving a more satisfactory résumé of the natural productions of this latter group, and to trace the relationship they bear to the other archipelagos, that I undertook the expedition.

On the 9th of March 1865, I and my brother, Captain Godman, started from Southampton, on board the Brazilian Mail Steam-vessel 'Oneida,' and on the 13th we landed at Lisbon. Here we found that the 'Leal,' a small screw-steamer, was to sail for the Azores on the 15th. This vessel runs, with more or less regularity, once a month, and, calling at five of the principal islands, returns direct to Lisbon. These two days we employed in visiting Cintra and its neighbourhood; and at 4 o'clock on the appointed day we found ourselves on board, steaming down the Tagus. We had few fellow-passengers, and but a light cargo; heavy weather, however, delayed our arrival; and it was not till the morning of the 21st that we anchored in the open roadstead of Ponta Delgada, the capital of St. Michael's. The gales which had followed us on our voyage were now succeeded by a perfect calm, leaving heavy clouds resting on the tops of the higher mountains, which, together with the dark foliage of the orange-groves and native evergreens, gave the island a peculiarly gloomy appearance.

It was nearly the end of the orange-season, but there were still about a dozen English schooners anchored off the town waiting for cargoes; and at a short distance out at sea were two more trying to come in, on board one of which was my collector, Mr. Brewer, whose services I had engaged to assist me more particularly in the Coleoptera.

^{*} In another place will be found what had been already done by Messrs. Morelet, Drouet, Watson, and others, in their several departments of natural history.

He had sailed direct from England, and had also experienced heavy weather, though on the whole he had made a fairly prosperous voyage of a fortnight from London.

The Azores lie between long. 25° and 30° 15′ W., and the most eastern islands are 16° west of Lisbon. They are nine in number, and may be divided into three groups—St. Michael's and St. Mary's forming the eastern, Terceira, Graciosa, St. George's, Pico, and Fayal the central, and Flores and Corvo the extreme western. They have an agregate area of 700 square miles, and are of volcanic origin.

St. Michael's, the largest, and to us the best known, from its trade in oranges, has a population of about 80,000 inhabitants. It stretches nearly east and west, being much longer than it is broad. At the eastern end the mountains rise to a height of upwards of 3500 feet, and are chiefly covered with tree-heath (Erica azorica), Juniper (Juniperus oxycedrus), Faya (Myrica faya), and other evergreen shrubs. The peak of Agua de Poa in the centre reaches a height of 3070 feet; between this and the west end the land is lower, but still studded with numerous small volcanic cones, nearly all of which bear traces of extinct craters at their summits. At the extreme western end, again, the mountains rise to nearly 3000 feet. coast is steep and rocky, and in some places the cliffs are 1400 feet high.

The first discovery of the islands is involved in uncertainty. Edrisi and Ibn al Vardi, the Arabian geographers, mention that beyond the Canaries to the northward are nine other islands in the western ocean. That these were the Azores seems more than probable, since their number is nine; special mention is also made of the abundance of a large species of Hawk, from which latter circumstance the Portuguese afterwards gave the name