

was dried up and parched; the water-courses were dry, and all the vegetation had disappeared except the weird-looking succulent weeds of the desert, which with their uncouth wrinkled forms and venomous spines looked like vegetable demons that could defy the heat and live anywhere. Here and there outside the town, where the carcass of a dead bullock or a horse had been flung out on the shingle or only half buried in it, polluting the air far and near, there were half a dozen of the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) perched lazily upon the bones, and, when disturbed, flying off slowly and alighting again at a distance of a few yards. A curious incident gave us a ghastly interest in the movements of these foul birds. A very excellent seaman-school-master, Mr. Adam Ebbels, whom we had taken with us from England, died suddenly just before we reached Bermudas, and his successor was to have joined us at Porto Grande. He came out in the same steamer with a sub-lieutenant who was also going to join the ship. They arrived ten days before the *Challenger*, and the school-master put up at the French hotel. On the Sunday before our arrival he went out to take a walk, and had not since been heard of. Of course, besides taking all the necessary official steps, we were all on the watch for traces of him, and we were told that, if he were dead, the vultures would be our surest guides to the place where the body lay. They have rather an unusual mode of looking at some things at San Vicente. When we were making inquiries about the missing school-master, the general impression seemed to be that he had met with foul play, as he was known to have had a small sum of money about him and a rather valuable watch when he left the hotel; and we were told, further, that a murderer lived in a cottage at a little distance from the town. It seems that there is good reason to believe that this man, who had been originally sent to San Vicente for the good of Portugal, had made away with several people during his stay on the island. Although his profession was by no means spoken of