

sea-shores, and large numbers make their burrows together, so that the ground is hollowed out in all directions.

Round the mouths of their burrows and on the even surface of the banks, between the holes, the birds lay out pebbles which they must carry up from the sea-shore for the purpose. The pebbles are of various colours, and the birds seem to collect them from curiosity, at least there appears to be no other explanation of the fact.* The edges of the birds' bills are excessively sharp, and one of them bit me as I was trying to secure it, and cut a strip out of my finger as clean as if it had been done with a razor.

Ascension Island. March 27th to April 3rd, 1876.—After a stay of ten days at Monte Video, during which time was afforded for a visit to Buenos Ayres, the ship reached Ascension Island on March 27th. Land Crabs swarm all over this barren and parched volcanic islet. They climb up to the very top of Green Mountain, and the larger ones steal the young rabbits from their holes and devour them. They all go down to the sea in the breeding season.

It always seems strange to me 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 high-roads far inland, at a height of several thousand feet, as much at home there as a beetle or a spider. Crabs of the same genus, *Telphusa*, live inland on the borders of streams in Greece and Italy.

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 one can swing oneself on shore from a boat when it is too rough for the boat to come close to the steps.

Close to the Dockyard is the Turtle Pond, in which there were over a hundred Turtles at the time of our 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 Turtles were still laying, but a good many lots of eggs were beginning to hatch out.

The Turtle 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 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

* See p. 134.