

ASCENSION.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES.

ASCENSION is in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, in lat. $7^{\circ} 57'$ S., and long. $14^{\circ} 28'$ W., and has an area of about thirty-four square miles, being about seven and a half miles long and six miles broad. It is wholly volcanic, and broken into hills and ravines, with a central peak, the Green Mountain, rising to a height of 2870 feet, and surrounded by a plateau from 1200 to 2000 feet high. There are no ponds or superficial springs, and therefore no running water, except during the rains; consequently, the island is exceedingly barren, except where artificial means have been employed to render the soil more productive.

The earliest record we have seen of the vegetation of Ascension is an enumeration¹ of the plants observed there by Mr James Cunninghame in 1698. The flowering plants mentioned therein, with their modern names, are:—

Chamæsyce frutescens elatior, floribus comosis	= Euphorbia organoides.
Chamæsyce frutescens humilior, floribus comosis	= Euphorbia organoides.
Convolvulus maritimus majore folio chinensi, Pluk., t. 24	= Ipomœa pes-capræ.
Ketmia fœtida flore luteo fundo purpureo	= Hibiscus trionum?
Festuca junceis foliis, spica minus sparsa, aristis trifidâ	= Aristida adscensionis.

Mr James Britten, of the British Museum, has searched the Sloane Herbarium for these plants, but only succeeded in finding the *Aristida* (Herb. Sl., vol. cclvi. p. 61); and it is probable they do not exist, for the title of the record in the Philosophical Transactions indicates "Shells, &c., collected," and "Plants observed." Assuming that there was no mistake, Cunninghame observed one plant, *Ipomœa pes-capræ*, in the island, which, so far as we are aware, has never been collected or seen there since. It is possible that this widely-spread littoral plant may have obtained a transient footing from seeds cast ashore by the waves, and afterwards suffered destruction by some means. From the perfectly reliable evidence of the eminent traveller Burchell, we know that such a thing happens on the coast of St Helena.

It was not till about the middle of the eighteenth century that more definite information of the vegetation of Ascension was published. In or about the year 1752, Osbeck,

¹ A Catalogue of Shells, &c., collected at the Island of Ascension, by Mr James Cunninghame, Surgeon, with what Plants he observed there; communicated to Mr James Petiver, F.R.S. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* (1699), **xxi.** p. 295, and abridged edition, **iv.** p. 419.