

smaller than St Helena, and 600 miles north-west of it. St Helena has been called a barren rock, but it is a paradise as compared with Ascension, which consists of a scorched mass of volcanic matter, in part resembling bottle-glass, and in part coke and cinders. A small green peak, 2800 feet above the sea, monopolises nearly all the vegetation, which consists of Purslane, a grass, and a Euphorbia in the lower parts of the island, whilst the green peak is clothed with a carpet of ferns, and here and there a shrub, allied to, but different from any St Helena one.<sup>1</sup> There are nine ferns, of which no less than six differ from those of St Helena, and three<sup>2</sup> of them are entirely confined to the islet."

A number of exotic plants have become naturalised in Ascension, and some of them are more prominent than the native plants. A. Richard<sup>3</sup> enumerates about twenty-five, but many of them were probably found only in cultivated ground. Excluding the probably introduced species contained in the following enumeration, a few others are more or less fully established, among them *Senebiera didyma*, *Oxalis corniculata*, *Urena lobata*, *Ageratum conyzoides*, *Solanum nigrum*, *Physalis*, sp., and *Plantago lanceolata*. Richard states that the *Physalis* covered all the higher parts of the island, and the fruit was much sought after by the inhabitants.

Previously to 1815 Ascension was uninhabited, but from that date there has always been a small population, and more or less cultivation. It was not, however, till 1857 that serious steps were taken to test the cultural capabilities of the island. A skilled gardener superintended the operations, and his success, in spite of droughts, was greater than had been anticipated. Planting was extensively carried out, and, as we learn from reports by Captain Barnard in 1862 and 1864, considerable numbers of a variety of trees and shrubs were in a flourishing condition, and many of the ravines were clothed with blackberry, furze, and other shrubs. In certain parts the soil was of sufficient depth and fertility to yield good crops; but we are not aware that any discoveries were made that would prove that there was ever a more varied and luxuriant indigenous vegetation. In consequence partly of the diversion of the ocean traffic through the Suez Canal, the importance of the island has decreased, and in consequence there is now little cultivation.

#### ON THE COMMUNITY OF ORIGIN OF THE PLANTS OF ASCENSION AND ST HELENA.

As Wallace says in his *Island Life*, it is much more philosophical to assume a common origin of the organisms of remote countries than to try to prove a former direct connection between them. There is little, indeed, in the following enumeration to suggest either; but the slight evidence offered below of three plants, supposed to be endemic in St

<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned that *Hedyotis adscensionis* is more nearly related to African and Asiatic species than it is to the St Helena *Hedyotis arborea*.

<sup>2</sup> That is, if we regard *Pteris flabellata*  $\beta$  *ascensionis* as a distinct species.

<sup>3</sup> *Sertum Astrolabianum*, pp. 54-56, 1834.