

a chaplain in the Swedish navy, brought home specimens of four flowering plants, which Linnæus described the following year in the first edition of his *Species Plantarum* (i. p. 82, &c.); and under *Aristida adscensionis* he has the following observation:—"Habitat in *Insula adscensionis, una ex quatuor istius pauperrimæ Floræ plantis, quarum* (1.) *Sherardia fruticosa*; (2.) *Euphorbia origanoides*; (3.) *Portulaca*." A comparison with the following enumeration reveals the fact that Osbeck nearly, or perhaps quite, exhausted the indigenous phanerogamic flora of the island! Indeed, we have no positive proof that more than two of the flowering plants are really indigenous. They are *Hedyotis adscensionis* (*Sherardia fruticosa*), and *Euphorbia origanoides*; both are endemic, and perhaps the remnant of a flora that is extinct, save these two species, so far as the flowering plants are concerned; yet it should be remembered that they belong to very widely diffused genera. Among vascular cryptogams there are two endemic ferns, namely, *Nephrodium ascensionis* and *Gymnogramme ascensionis*, the former being most nearly allied to the endemic St Helena species, and the latter not very different from the widely diffused *Gymnogramme leptophylla*, and even nearer the American *Gymnogramme chærophylla*. In 1867, Mr Baker¹ enumerated seven ferns as the total number then known to inhabit Ascension. In the following enumeration are eleven species; the additional ones being *Blechnum australe*, *Asplenium dentatum*, *Nephrodium molle*, and *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. The first was sent to Kew in 1875 by Mr Alex. Blake, without, as far as we have been able to ascertain, direct evidence of its being wild in the island; the second is given on the authority of Bory;² the third is almost ubiquitous in warm countries, and may have been carried with some of the numerous plants introduced from time to time for cultivation, while the fourth may be reckoned with the undoubtedly indigenous plants. On the whole, as Mr Baker observes, the ferns of Ascension exhibit a want of any decided characteristic. Altogether, however, the indigenous vegetation is so exceedingly meagre that it offers nothing for consideration from a phyto-geographical standpoint, except a possible relation to the flora of St Helena, briefly discussed below. Darwin³ says: "Near the coast nothing grows; further inland an occasional green castor-oil plant, and a few grasshoppers, true friends of the desert, may be met with. Some grass is scattered over the surface of the central elevated region, and the whole much resembles the worse parts of the Welsh mountains. But, scanty as the pasture appears, about six hundred sheep, many goats, a few cows and horses, all thrive well on it."

Wallace has merely a passing allusion to it in his *Island Life*; and Sir Joseph Hooker, in his interesting essay on insular floras,⁴ sums up the vegetation of Ascension in the following short paragraph. "The islet of Ascension claims a passing notice; it is much

¹ *Trans. Linn. Soc. Lond.*, xxvi. p. 347.

² In Duperr. *Voy. "Coquille," Bot. Crypt.*, p. 270.

³ *Journal of Researches*, p. 492.

⁴ Lecture on Insular Floras, delivered before the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Nottingham in 1866.