

CHAPTER IX

SANTA CRUZ, PATAGONIA, AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

Santa Cruz; Expedition up the River; Indians; Immense Streams of Basaltic Lava; Fragments not transported by the River; Excavation of the Valley; Condor, habits of; Cordillera; Erratic Boulders of great size; Indian Relics; Return to the Ship; Falkland Islands; Wild Horses, Cattle, Rabbits; Wolf-like Fox; Fire made of Bones; Manner of Hunting Wild Cattle; Geology; Streams of Stones; Scenes of Violence; Penguin; Geese; Eggs of Coris; Compound Animals.

April 13th, 1834. The *Beagle* anchored within the mouth of the Santa Cruz. This river is situated about sixty miles south of Port St. Julian. During the last voyage Captain Stokes proceeded thirty miles up it, but then, from the want of provisions, was obliged to return. Excepting what was discovered at that time, scarcely anything was known about this large river. Captain Fitz Roy now determined to follow its course as far as time would allow. On the 18th three whale-boats started, carrying three weeks' provisions; and the party consisted of twenty-five souls—a force which would have been sufficient to have defied a host of Indians. With a strong flood-tide and a fine day we made a good run, soon drank some of the fresh water, and were at night nearly above the tidal influence.

The river here assumed a size and appearance which, even at the highest point we ultimately reached, was scarcely diminished. It was generally from three to four hundred yards broad, and in the middle about seventeen feet deep. The rapidity of the current, which in its whole course runs at the rate of from four to six knots an hour, is perhaps its most remarkable feature. The water is of a fine blue colour, but with a slight milky tinge, and not so transparent as at first sight would have been expected. It flows over a bed of pebbles, like those which compose the beach and the surrounding plains. It runs in a winding course through a valley, which extends in a direct line westward. This valley varies from five to ten miles in breadth; it is bounded by step-formed terraces, which rise in most parts, one above the other, to the