To Charles, at first sight, the islands appeared utterly desolate, sloping symmetrical cones of black lava completely covered with leafless brushwood and stunted trees. That was the end of his discouragement, for when H.M.S. Beagle anchored in St. Stephen's Harbor off Chatham Island, he found the bay abounding with fish, sharks and turtles popping their heads up out of the sea. His line went over the side with the rest of the crew and he immediately began pulling up fine fish, two to three feet long, the heavy catch flapping all over the deck. After the midday meal he climbed ashore with King and Stokes; the day was glowing hot, the black lava resembling Annie's stove at The Mount. He was astounded by the enormous family of reptiles living on the lava, not only the hard-shelled, slow-moving tortoises, the tiny head stuck out on its short thick neck from a stone-hard plated carapace, but the slithery creatures on the low-lying rocks, thousands heaped upon each other five and six deep: "Disgusting, clumsy lizards, black as the porous lava they're lying on," he exclaimed. "I didn't know they were living creatures until I came within a couple of feet of them."

Stokes grimaced at the uncanny sight: "I've heard them described as 'imps of darkness.'"

Charles turned away without attempting to capture one. He preferred to botanize, climbing the slope of a dead volcano and gathering ten different specimens, "so insignificant and ugly," he cried, "that Professor Henslow will think I have been gathering in the arctic instead of the tropics."

They also smelled unpleasant.

What did delight him that first day was the variety of birds, species he had not seen before.

"All new, all different! My ornithology friends in England are in for a treat."

The birds were so innocent of man, and

unafraid, that King killed one with his hat, and Charles pushed a large hawk off a branch.

The finds on the following day, from a different Chatham anchorage, were equally overwhelming: the black rocks at the shore line crawled with an infinity of bright red crabs, the sandy areas were alive with sea lions honking great noises at each other between graceful swims in the sea.

He exclaimed:

"The island looked dead from a distance but what an immense variety of life has been created here."

He and Stokes walked to the top of a large but low crater. The country to the north was studded with small black cones which Charles described as ancient chimneys for the subterranean melted fluids. Using his hammer, he quickly ascertained that the volcano they had climbed had once been submarine. He chipped away samples of hard sandstone composed of volcanic dust.

Each day in the Galápagos provided separate adventures as the Beagle made its way from anchorage to anchorage surveying the different islands: Chatham, James, Charles, Narborough, Albermarle, the highest and boldest of the volcanic peaks, its east side black with lava, sterile and dry, studded with small craters which were appendages to the great volcanic mounts from which the black lava had flowed. Charles frequently took his bedroll and a tent ashore accompanied by one or more of his shipmates. They bivouacked under a miserable little spring of water in a small valley; crossed black sand which was disagreeable to pass over even in thick boots, and brown sand which registered 137° when they placed a thermometer in it, as high as the thermometer could register!

On James Island their walk was a long one. About six miles to an elevation of two thousand
feet, very dry, very hot, the trees low and crooked and nearly leafless but of a larger size than he had thus far observed. At three thousand feet they found the only watering places on the island. Clouds hung over this highest land; the vapor condensed by the trees dripped down like rain. It was wonderfully refreshing. Sometimes they made "wet landings," onto narrow, shallow beaches, rolling their loose-bottomed trousers above the knees, tying their shoes around their neck by the laces, the socks stuffed inside, slipping off the side of the whaleboat after waiting out the incoming wave to wade ashore, the water high on their legs as they picked their way over pumice rocks and pebbles. Sometimes they approached a sharply inclining lava cliff, fingernails and toes holding onto weathered crevices in the near perpendicular walls.

Since the crew members had been bringing back ten to fifteen giant tortoises a day, he and Sym tried to lift one. All they got for their pains was a solid hissing before the enormous antediluvian creature pulled in its head and began to move pachydermously away. Charles stood on the tortoise's thick-crusted shell but this did not stop its inching forward.

"In fact," he said with a grin, "he hardly noticed! I wonder how old he is. It's said they can live for hundreds of years. This cactus they chew on must be Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth."

The geology was instructive and amusing: craters of all sizes and forms studded about in every direction; some so tiny they might properly be called specimen craters. There were layers of volcanic sandstone, streams of lava naked, black, rough andorrind, grand fields of trachytic lava containing large crystals of glassy, fractured feldspar. The streams were mostly naked of water, their age marked by the presence or absence of foliage; he now believed every plant or tree was in flower or leaf, brown being its prevalent color. Some of the craters were high hills, getting greener as one ascended the peaks, these upland green valleys frequently capturing a refreshing southerly trade wind.

He explored the black cones of craters which resembled the ironwork chimneys at Wolverhampton, large circular pits, "which were probably produced by a volume of gas at the time when the lava was liquid."

He exclaimed joyfully:

"It's always delightful to behold anything which has long been familiar, but only by description."

One night he slept on the beach, then spent the next day collecting a variety of black basaltic lava, volcanic dust, ancient shells, insects he could describe but not name; cactus, brushwood, birds, the marine iguana which he had at first found disgusting but now admired for the way it glided into the sea for sustenance, evaded its only enemy, the shark, and returned to bake in the hot sun. In this hot tropical sun Charles's hair became a goldish red, as in the cold of Tierra del Fuego the color had frozen out to leave it dark.

He had failed to anticipate the breath-taking beauty of the archipelago: the brilliant blueness of the sky and sea; the rich plumage of the myriad birds: frigates with their inflatable orange or red throat pouches, penguins, the clean white-masked and blue-footed boobies; the flightless cormorant with its truncated, useless wings, the waved albatross, lava and swallow-tailed gull, the red-billed tropic bird, the night heron, finches; the little pools where baby seals romped playfully, the massive bull sea lion flopping up to the best flat rock on the promontory, where his females could gather round him; the sea turtle digging a hole in the sand to deposit its eggs; the birds dropping their eggs on meager stick nests on the hard lava ground or in their mating places high on the pock-marked, scarified pumice cliffs; the thick, stumpy-legged tortoises looking like inhabitants of another planet; the sounds of birds, reptiles, fish and sea animals. And very high up, the green foliage where the palo santo, the button man grove, matasarno had taken hold in the earth that the winds had blown in over the aeons; the tall, distorted cactus trees, a peculiar rugged cactus whose large oval leaves formed connecting branches. The blowholes where the sea erupted like geysers; the submarine cliffs descending as far as two miles to the bed of the ocean; circular lakes, cliffs sculptured by wind and sea into fantastic columnar shapes.