

CHAPTER V.

RIO NEGRO.

1839.

THE winds proved light and variable during our passage to Rio Negro, and we occasionally experienced a southwesterly current, of little strength. On the 18th January, when seventy-eight miles distant from the mouth of the Rio la Plata, we passed through the discoloured water of that river. Its temperature was 4° less than that of the surrounding sea. After getting to the southward of the river, the direction of the current changed, and it was found to be setting to the northward.

Towards evening, on the 19th, we met many discoloured patches in the water, and found they proceeded from a species of *Salpæ*, which we had not before seen. When the night closed in, the sea became very luminous, the vessels in passing through the water leaving long bright trains behind them. Vivid lightning in the west showed a dark bank of clouds, betokening a storm. About 10 o'clock P. M., a haze suddenly enveloped us; the temperature of both air and water fell from 67° to 57° , ten degrees, giving a cold clammy feeling to the air. The water became quite smooth, and the breeze died away; all on deck seemed awakened to a sense of danger. We immediately shortened sail and sounded, but found no bottom with one hundred and fifty fathoms of line. The vessels of the squadron came up in close order, sailing as it were in a sea of silver, from the light of which their forms became visible. The effect was beautiful, and increased the mysterious and alarming sensation. Shortly after, we had a change of wind to the southwest, followed by a dense fog, which lasted for a day; but the temperature of both air and water remained six to eight degrees colder, until the 23d, when it again rose to the height it had been before.