

I.—Trade and trading arrangements: Mr. Sterndale.

about the Bahama Banks, and at Green Turtle Bay; they realize a high price in the market, but as far as I have seen do not differ from those found in the Pacific. To fish for sponges with success requires a certain degree of practice, as they are very difficult to recognize in the water when in a live state. They grow on the coral, and very much in the crevices of it, and are not by any means conspicuous, as they look like a part of the stone. When removed, they are heavy, slimy, hard, and black as tar. The best of them are of the form of a mushroom, and they are found from the size of a man's fist up to two feet in diameter. They usually lie within the lagoons, in water of a depth from one to ten fathoms. They are inhabited by animalculæ, which in the process of cleaning are decomposed and washed away. In order to effect this object upon a sandy beach where the tide ebbs and flows, a number of forked sticks are driven into the sand, and upon them are fastened slender poles as a sort of framework; from these sponges are suspended by strings in such a manner that when the tide is in the sponges are floating in it; when it is not, they are exposed to the wind and sun. In the latter case the animalculæ die and decay, and by alternate scorchings and washings the sponge becomes cleaned and bleached, as well as softened, in consequence of the removal of the glutinous creatures which had inhabited it. When prepared in this manner, the usual rate of barter in the islands where they are chiefly obtained is four large sponges for one yard of calico. I have found that they were greatly improved both in colour and softness by being washed in hot fresh water, which had been previously strongly impregnated with the alkali of wood ashes.

I have had occasion, in a former paper, to mention turtle-shell as one of the valuable products of the coral isles. It is commonly spoken of as tortoise-shell, which, in the case of the hawksbill turtle, is no great misnomer, as there is but little difference between the animals, except in so far that the latter has flippers instead of paws. On the Gallapagos is a gigantic species of tortoise, of which the shell is of no use, though the flesh is very good eating. This creature, which is, I believe, found nowhere else on the face of the earth, grows to so great a bulk as to weigh half a ton, and it is said even more; he is quite harmless. A seaman of a New Bedford whale-ship, a few years ago, was supposed by his companions to have lost himself on one of the Gallapagos. They sought him for a week without success, when to their astonishment he made his appearance driving one of these immense brutes with a club. It was the largest they had ever seen or heard of, and he had spent several days and nights in getting it down from the mountains to the sea-beach. This monster might probably have been several centuries old, for, like all the tortoise tribe, they are of very slow growth. I believe that it is admitted by men of science that there is strong presumptive evidence of land tortoises of the old world, in a domesticated state, having lived for more than two hundred years. Twenty years ago two young tortoises of the Gallapagos were brought to Aitutake by a whale-fisher, who had a wife and family on that island. He took them on shore in his pockets and let them go adrift in the bush. Eight years afterwards the natives found one of them dead after a bush fire, and they say it was no larger than the blade of a paddle, which would be of an oval shape and about a foot in diameter. The Gallapagos Islands, which are a horrible congeries of extinct volcanic craters, seem to be inhabited by no living creatures but these great tortoises, and vast multitudes of hideous iguanas, which also are very good eating. Among the natives of the coral isles there are certain laws with respect to catching turtle. Whosoever sees the turtle first (be it man or woman) claims the shell. Be it remembered the shell is valuable to them for many purposes. Not only do they make of it many articles of domestic use, but among the more savage tribes it is carved into grotesque ornaments, which they attach to their heads and bodies; also they cut it into long strips, with which they cover the seams of their canoes, and of the thickest portion they make ear-rings, finger-rings, bracelets, and fish-hooks. In fact, it would be difficult to enumerate the multitude of uses to which the "una home," as it is called, is devoted by barbarians. Some of the bones also of the turtle are made to serve many useful purposes—such as bodkins, fish-hooks, spoons, and especially knives. Civilized men will be apt to smile at the idea of a bone knife; but I have seen many knives made from the blade-bones of the turtle, which, although clumsy in form, were quite as effective for any ordinary purpose as steel knives could have been; one which I had in my own possession was very old, having been made in a former generation. It required to be very seldom sharpened, and then took such an edge as no man would like to run his finger carelessly along. When a turtle is caught, be it large or small, the flesh is divided among the whole of the inhabitants of the village to which the captors belong, so that in many cases a very small piece comes to the share of each individual. The weight of a full-grown turtle is usually about 4 cwt. in the Pacific, but sometimes they are found as much as 6 cwt. They are profitable to fish for, not only on account of the shell, but for the oil which they contain, of which a good-sized one will yield ten gallons. The trade price is usually one dollar per gallon. Among savages they are sought after chiefly for the flesh, which they eat either cooked or raw. It is like beef, and is no great delicacy. Turtle soup, as far as I can understand it, resembles the broth which a cobbler is said to have made of his lapstone; he was supplied with a variety of excellent ingredients to boil with it, and it turned out very good indeed. The creature is killed by striking it on the back of the head with a club; a bundle of dry leaves is then ignited and passed over the shell, so as to loosen the plates, which are pulled off; the under-part of the shell is then split from the upper, and the meat is cut up. On some lands all turtles are claimed by the King; in that case, the plates being removed from the back, the animal is put whole into an oven of hot stones, and baked. When there are not sufficient in the company to consume the whole carcase at one meal, the residue is preserved in a very ingenious manner. The turtle being baked with his back down, the hollow of the shell is full of melted fat or oil; this is baled out and taken care of; the meat which is intended to be preserved is cut into junks, each about the size of a man's fist. One or more of these is put into a cocoanut shell, and the oil poured upon it till the shell is nearly filled; the mouth is then closed, with a green leaf tied over it; it is then put away until wanted, when it is again put into the oven and made hot. In this manner the meat can be preserved for an indefinite time without spoiling.