

There are several ways of catching turtle, but the most usual is to watch for them at night. When they are taken during the day, it is generally by surprising them while they are asleep on the surface of the water. On those occasions, the practice is, as soon as the turtle is discovered, for several persons to go out to him in a canoe, and paddle silently alongside, when they seize him and lift him on board before he knows what is going on. They are quite harmless, except in the mere matter of floundering and striking out with their flippers, with which they can deliver a severe blow. It is very rare for them to attempt to bite. When a turtle is found sleeping, and he be of great size, and but few men to seize him, it is usual to harpoon him. During the breeding season these creatures are very careless of their safety; they are found in congeries, and, under certain circumstances, exhibit no sense of danger, or desire to escape from the presence of man. When several turtles are in this state, a like number of men, having approached them in a canoe, will jump overboard and lay hold of them thus: The man gets on the back of the turtle, and takes hold with his hands of the front of the shell, just behind the neck. This prevents him from "sounding," that is to say, going down head foremost, as a turtle will always do when alarmed, if not prevented, as in this case he is effectually by the weight of the man on his back. He is thus quite helpless, for he has no idea of getting rid of his rider, except by diving head first, and allows himself to be steered in any direction his captors may choose. Thus he is brought up alongside of the canoe, and hoisted into it without resistance. But in playing this little game, which seems so simple, there are several things which it is necessary to know. One of them is, that a turtle in the water can cut a naked man very dangerously with his flippers. Another thing to be avoided is to catch the turtle by the tail. God help the man that knows no better than to do so, for the reptile will in that case instantly shut his tail close up to his body, whereby he will hold the man's hand as tight as though it were in a vice, and, diving head foremost, will take him down to the bottom of the sea. On lagoon isles, turtles are never (except by some extraordinary accident) found within the reef, unless the lagoon have a wide entrance, through which the tide ebbs and flows freely. They do not like stagnant or warm water, but delight in the fresh dashing spray which breaks upon the outer reef. There, also, they find the long green moss upon which they delight to feed. There are times of the year, however, when they are found wandering about in the shallow water upon the top of the reef in search of small *bêche-de-mer*, which they swallow in great quantities until they quite fill themselves. At those times, whenever the male or bull turtle is found, the female is not far away; they are generally close together. In such cases the savages declare that the turtle are bound on a cruise to some island far away, and are laying in provender for their voyage. When found upon the coral shoals, it is usual to secure them by spearing them with a harpoon, not of course by attempting to pierce the shell, but by driving it into any of the orifices, generally the back of the neck. But the greater number of turtle are taken on shore, on sandy beaches, where they resort to lay their eggs during the night. They select for this purpose solitary places, not necessarily on uninhabited isles, but always at a distance from the dwellings of men. About full moon is a favourite time with them. The female goes on shore; the male lies out beyond the breakers and watches for his mate. She lands with the high tide, and returns to the sea with the next flood; consequently, she remains on shore several hours. If overtaken by daylight before high water, she goes out on the reef and lies still there, waiting for the tide to come in. While in this situation, turtle are often taken by fishers, as they do not attempt to move, not even if a man should tread upon them, which has frequently happened in the grey of the dawn to men who have been out early seeking other fish. When the turtle lands to lay, she goes well up on the dry beach above high-water mark, frequently under the shadow of trees, and there scratches out a great circular hollow, throwing out the sand with her flippers. As the creature turns herself round and round in the hole, it becomes smooth within, like a basin, and about so deep that the turtle sinks below the level of the surrounding sand. Then, in the middle of this pit, she digs out a small perpendicular cavity, about the depth of a man's arm, and therein deposits her eggs to the number of over 100, and, filling up the whole excavation, returns to sea. Thus, though a man may easily find the track of a turtle, it takes considerable experience to discover the eggs. It is the practice of the fishers to walk round the beach, after high tide, in places where the turtles are expected to resort, on moonlight nights, about full and change, and to look for the signs of their presence, which are easily discoverable, as the animal leaves a broad track on the sand. This they follow up until they find her either lying in a pit or on her way to or from the water. The turtle offers no resistance, but tries to make its escape into the sea, and it is surprising, from its clumsy appearance, with what rapidity it can get over the ground. The mode of capture is to turn it over on its back, and it does not seem very feasible, for the uninitiated in the business, how a single man, running in heavy sand, can contrive to capsize an animal of 300 lb. or even greater weight. But there is a knack extremely simple to those who are used to it. The manner of a turtle's locomotion on dry land, when interfered with or obstructed, is by wriggling with sudden jerks from side to side, making short strokes with its flippers. The fisher takes his opportunity when it is just on the cant, and tips it over on its back with ease. Much injury is frequently done to the shell by turning the animal over on the stones and gravel, and leaving it there, as in its efforts to right itself it cuts and scrapes the plates. It is likewise abominable to witness the ill-treatment which these animals experience at the hands not only of savages but white fishers, before they are finally despatched, being often kept for hours on the hot sand under the broiling sun, their shells also scorched by fire off their backs while they are still alive, and then being battered about the head with clubs often for half an hour before life is extinct. They are, of course, very tenacious of life, like all the reptilia; but one would think that there can be no better way to kill them without torture than to cut off their head with a sharp axe or cleaver. Even in that case they continue to move about for some time afterwards, and I have noticed that the head, when not taken off close to the base of the skull apparently will not die at all, at least until decomposition has far advanced. I have never been able to understand this; but it seemed to me to involve some strange mystery,

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