

## Agriculture, &c.

### AN INTERESTING VISIT TO A GUANO ISLAND.

Amongst all the new-fangled manures introduced by experimentalizing agriculturists, during the last twenty years, not one has been so rapidly and universally adopted as guano. Its astonishing fertilizing qualities, and easy mode of application have rendered it a general favorite with the farmers, though the immense distance of the places from which it is chiefly obtained, and its consequent high price, must limit its use, even if the supplies were inexhaustible.

The island of Ichaboe, on the west coast of Africa, from whence guano was first obtained in large quantities, is perhaps the most remarkable instance of a desolate rock becoming suddenly the port of destination for hundreds of large ships, and the source of immense wealth to numerous individuals. But Ichaboe was soon exhausted, and the dusty treasure that had for many centuries been accumulating on its rocky bosom, was literally swept away. The once busy island has now returned to its former loneliness, and the fleet of ships that gathered round it, seek on still more distant coasts, the fertilizing powder that will fatten the impoverished fields of Old World countries.

More than half the guano imported during the last ten years, has been obtained from a small group of islands called the Chincas, that lie off the port of Pisco, on the Peruvian coast. Of these islands, the largest, Sangallan, has very little guano upon it, the principal deposits being found on three smaller ones, the most northern of the group. These are distinguished as the North, Middle, and South Islands. The North island has been constantly worked ever since the introduction of guano. The middle one has also been occasionally invaded; but the South island, on which we believe the accumulation to be greatest, remains untouched.

Every ship bound to the Chincas is compelled to anchor at Pisco, in order to pass the necessary custom-house formalities, before proceeding to the loading ground. A couple of hours are then sufficient to carry her across the few miles of water that intervene, and she soon drops her anchor amongst the numerous fleet that is ever lying off the island, waiting their turn to load. The odorous scent of the guano is distinctly perceptible at several miles distance, and is far from unpleasant, when thus mingled with the pure sea air.

The first duty of the crew after the ship's arrival is to discharge the extra ballast, and as the plains have no dread of port officers, or harbor masters, the sand or stone is quietly tossed overboard, until there is barely sufficient left in the hold to keep the vessel on an even keel. In the meantime the long boat is hoisted out of her berth alongside, and a part of her crew are busily employed in bringing off boat-loads of guano from the island, to replace the discharged ballast.—

The peculiar odour pervades the whole ship—the carefully tarred rigging becomes a dirty brown, while the snow white decks and closely furled sails, assume the same dark hue.

On the side next the mainland, the islands rise precipitately from the sea to a considerable height, presenting only a bare, dark wall of rock. From the upper edge of the precipice, the huge mound of guano slopes rapidly upwards for a short distance, and then spreads into a level surface that gradually descends on every other side to within a few yards of the water. Here and there, huge craggy points thrust their white heads through the brown crust of guano, which has completely filled up the deep hollows that have originally existed in the island, and would soon, had it not been disturbed, have covered even the crests of what were once tall pinnacles. The only safe landing place is on a narrow strip of beach, the remainder of the island being surrounded by low rock, and small detached reefs; but the irregular formation has greatly facilitated the loading of ships, enabling the crews to accomplish that in a few days, which, under other circumstances, must have cost them studious weeks of labor. Close to the face of the rock the water is deep enough to float the largest merchantman; and the steady constancy of the trade-wind, which rarely increases here beyond a pleasant breeze, enables the ship to lie in perfect safety in close contact with her two most dangerous enemies—a rocky island, and a dead lee shore.

Having taken aboard by her boats sufficient guano to ballast her, the ship is hauled in close to the steep reef, to which she is securely bound with warps and chains, two anchors being dropped to seaward, to enable her to haul off again when loaded.

Down to the very edge of the precipice, on its summit, comes the point of a triangular enclosure, open at its base, and made of strong stakes driven into the solid guano, and closely knit together with iron chains. At the point resting upon the edge of the cliff, there is a small opening, to which there is firmly attached a wide canvass pipe, which hangs down the face of the precipice, and passes into the hold of the vessel beneath. The enclosure, which will contain several hundred tons, is filled with guano by the Indian laborers, and a small line that encloses the mouth of the pipe being slacked, the whole mass is poured into the ship at a rate which very soon completes her cargo. From different parts of the pipe, bow-lines lead to the mast-heads of the vessel, and from thence on deck, where they are tended by the crew, who alternately haul upon and slack them, so as to keep the long pipe in motion, and prevent its choking. But however well they may succeed in that effort, the men have considerable difficulty in avoiding some such catastrophe in their own persons; for the guano, after falling from so great an elevation, rises through the hatchways in one immense cloud, that completely envelopes the ship, and renders the inhaling of anything else but dust almost a matter of impossibility. The men