

# WORLD'S BIGGEST SPONGE FOUND IN THE BAHAMAS.

THE old and historic City of Nassau, New Providence, Bahama Islands, experienced quite a sensation about the middle of March in the matter of sponges. The principal industry of Nassau is the gathering, curing, and selling of sponges, and quite a large fleet of schooners and many colored men, composing their crews, are engaged in gathering them around the neighboring islands. One of these schooners came to port recently, having as part of its cargo the largest fine sponge ever taken from the Atlantic Ocean. When laid out upon the dock among thousands of other sponges classified for sale by auction this particular one attracted general attention and admiration. It is what is known as a wool sponge, which is the finest quality known among spongers. It is in form perfectly round, arched like an immense fruit cake, and is six feet in circumference and two feet in diameter in every direction. When taken from the water it weighed between eighty and ninety pounds, and the fortunate man who captured it had a hard time landing it in his dory. Now that it has dried out and been relieved of all excrescences it weighs about twelve pounds.

Its equal in size, fine quality, and attractive appearance has never been seen. When it was presented for sale it was put in a class by itself, and there were many competitors in the bidding for it, every dealer in sponges being anxious to secure it. It was finally awarded to the firm of O. F. Pritchard at \$23. It has been suggested to Mr. Pritchard that the National Museum in Washington would be glad to receive such a curiosity.

This immense sponge is peculiar in that it had no fixed habitation, no permanent attachment to anything, but is what is known as a "roller," being tossed about by the waves in every direction. Rolling about in this way at the mercy of the waves, it naturally acquired its present perfectly round shape. It reminds one of the "tumble weed" of the Western prairies that is blown about in the winds, assuming its round, ball-like shape, as it rolls about in any direction the wind chooses to give it.

The gathering, curing, selling, and exporting of sponges is the principal industry of Nassau. The sales of sponges for export average about \$500,000 annually—most of them going to England and France, but some of the coarser ones find

a market in Russia. A large number of small vessels, nearly four hundred, are engaged in the work of gathering sponges, which are found in the vicinity of many of the islands of the Bahama group. The vessels are manned, according to their size, by nine, eleven, thirteen, or fifteen men, always an odd number, the odd man being the cook and in charge of the schooner while the others are out in dories hunting for sponges.

There is a popular idea that sponges are secured by divers, who go under water

## Gender of Garlic

WHY is garlic masculine gender?" said the man who markets. "It must be masculine because the greengrocers I buy from call it 'he.' They are mostly Italians, and ought to know the sex of garlic if anybody does. Of all the vegetables and aromatic herbs I buy garlic is the only one to which masculine virtues are ascribed. Everything else is neuter. To call garlic 'it' would be an insult. The garlic, he is fresh, he is fine, he is cheap, he is dear. Funny, ain't it?"

and detach them from their holdings among the rocks. This is not true as regards the sponging trade in the Bahamas, however it may be conducted elsewhere. The men go out in dories, like the fishermen of Gloucester, and through a water glass search for the sponges. This water glass is simply an ordinary pail or bucket with a glass bottom. Holding one of these over the side of his dory, the sponger locates the sponges, and then with a long pole having a hook on the end he seizes upon the mass, tears it loose, and gathers it into his boat, whence it is later transferred to the vessel. When a quantity has thus been secured, the vessel puts in to one of the islands, where a cache or pen has been previously established at the water's edge. The sponges are thrown into this pen, where they are left for several days, being washed by the ebb and flow of the tides, until the animal matter, sand, and other extraneous substances have been washed away. While this is going on the vessel returns to its hunting grounds and continues its labors until a sufficient cargo has been procured to warrant the return to port. A sponger is usually absent from two to three months, and the return of one or

more to port is an event of almost daily occurrence.

The industry is carried on on the cooperative plan, the Captain and crew sharing with the owner of the vessel in the profits of their work. The owner furnishes the schooner fully equipped, and supplies the necessary provisions for the voyage. On the return of the vessel the sponges are turned over to the Sponge Exchange. They are then spread out on the dock, sorted, and classified according to quality. Purchasers carefully go over the exhibits and make their tenders for the different lots to the officials of the Exchange. These tenders are then examined and the awards made to the different buyers. Out of the proceeds of such a sale the owner of the vessel gets one-third, expenses are then deducted, and the remainder divided among the vessel's crew.

It is a hard life these spongers lead, never especially remunerative, while quite frequently the men are exposed to all the hardships and perils of a seafaring life, without any compensation whatever, their voyage having been a failure. The crews are all colored men, belonging to Nassau or the neighboring islands.