



GATHERING EDIBLE BIRDNESTS.—FROM "THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS."

IN a small island in the province of Bagelea, is Mount Karang-Ballong, the highest point of which is not more than 500 ft., projecting, in the form of heavy grey and black rocks, into the sea. It can be ascended without much difficulty; and if the traveller, catching hold of a rope, looks over the rock, he observes that it is not only 200 ft. high, but that it bends inwards, so that on the top it beetles over the sea, which rushes in with great force below, and that in the side of the rock facing the sea innumerable fissures, caverns, and clefts reach down, even under the surface of the water. Millions of tiny, greyish birds, a species of swallow, nestle in those interstices of the rocks. They construct their nests, composed of some gluey or jelly-like substance, on the granite walls of those dark—to man almost impenetrable—caverns and fissures. There, sentinelled by the ocean, the little creatures may imagine they are safe from the coveting eye and greedy grasp of man. But they greatly deceive themselves, for these nests form a dainty dish, especially in the estimation of Chinese opium-smugglers, and are almost worth their weight in gold. Three times a year the nest-gathering takes place in those caves and hollows. In stormy weather it would, of course, be impossible to enter them,

and even when the sea is comparatively calm it is still a very dangerous undertaking. Down a rattan ladder the Javanese bird-nest-gatherer descends to a distance of two hundred feet perpendicularly from the projecting cliff along the granite wall. When he approaches the entrance to the cavern which he has selected as the locality for his researches, he waits till the wave has rushed inward, and then dextrously swings himself after it. In the interior a bamboo scaffolding has been erected, fastened by ropes to the walls of the vault. Standing on this scaffolding, he takes the nests from the walls to which they are attached, or when beyond his reach, pulls them down with a hook made for the purpose. In the mean time the waves are continually rushing in and out just below him, and, should the sea become suddenly stormy, or a squall arise so that the nest-gatherer cannot escape in time, the unfortunate creature is washed away to certain death. The trade in these bird-nests is not only a source of great gain to the merchants settled in Java, but it is also a source of wealth to the exchequer of the Netherlands, yielding, in the form of duty, about a quarter of a million sterling.