

CHAPTER XII.

MARSH MUCK AND PEAT.

This material, so abundant in some of our tide-water districts, has much attracted the attention of farmers in the eastern States, as well as in many parts of Europe.

Its characters vary with the localities where it exists, depending upon its relations with the adjacent dry land and the more or less saltness of the water. If the waters which flow from high lands carry the mud or wash upon the marsh, the muck will abound in earthy matters; but in other situations it is found to be more peaty, and to consist principally of altered remains of the plants from which it was formed. This kind is in fact a sort of spongy peat, and is the best for manure. To this variety I give the name of peaty muck.

Owing to the presence of sulphate of iron or copperas, it has often proven injurious to the soil; but if composted with about one-tenth its bulk of lime, and be permitted to remain one year before being applied to the soil, it has, so far as I have learned, proven useful.

It should be also remembered, that these marshes abound with insects and aquatic animals, and that by the death of these and the decay of their remains, the value of the material is much enhanced.

Where the barn or stables are at no great distance from the material, an excellent plan is to cover the barnyard with it, (say three feet deep,) in the autumn, and to spread the manure from the stable evenly over it. It will also be the better for being trodden down by cattle during the winter, as it will be much enriched by their dung and urine.

It has been stated, when this mode of using the peat or muck is practiced, that the effective value of the mass, (although it be one-half peat,) is equal to the same bulk or weight of manure. When the peaty variety is first dug and thrown out, it is saturated with water, which of course should be allowed to dry off before it is hauled to the barnyard or composted. It then becomes an absorbent of ammonia, and also retains the urine and liquid of the manure, which too many farmers allow to run to waste.

It has been ascertained that dried fibrous peat possesses disinfecting properties in a high degree, owing to its power of absorbing gasses and vapors. When it is heated in close vessels or in