

the shell. A very great number of the most valuable pearls on the Pacific fisheries, as a rule, have been, and still are, lost, for this reason: The fishers allow their diving women to open the shells, which they do squatted upon the sand of the beach, holding the great oysters between their knees, when they wrench them open, a process which requires considerable force, and in the act whatsoever pearls may be loose in the shell immediately slip out with the water and slime which the shell contains, and are irrevocably lost. These are the finest of all pearls. They are not plentiful, but occur occasionally, and their value is after this manner, that one of them is in the majority of cases worth more than all those put together which may be obtained in the usual way (that is to say, lodged in the muscle) out of several tons of pearl oysters.

If it were in the power of man to get up and sift the bottom of any pearl oyster bank in the world, how great would be the treasure obtained! forasmuch as oysters in their old age (that is to say, past the seventh year of their growth) produce pearls most largely, then die and discharge their contents. It may be well said of all localities where the pearl oyster grows, that

There are jewels rich and rare
In the caverns of the deep,

inasmuch as that for every pearl of value that has been fished up by man, how many thousands have been buried in the sand, or incorporated in coral petrifications! As concerns the losing of pearls in the opening of shells with the knife, such could not occur on the Oriental fisheries, where the oysters are all deposited in pits to decay, and the remains afterwards carefully washed and sifted; but there is no necessity for so unhealthy and tedious a process. A practised hand can readily open 1,000 shells in a day's work in such a manner as to make sure that not a single pearl shall be lost. One circumstance I have noticed, that when pearl oysters grow singly (apart from each other), they produce but very few pearls. Where they are crowded together, or tightly jammed in crevices of rocks, the reverse is the case. This may have some connection with want of liberty to move about, whereby they perhaps become diseased, for it is a fact that pearl oysters at certain times *walk*; that is to say, shift their quarters from rock to rock. However unlikely this may appear from the aspect of the shell, and the seemingly immovable manner in which they attach themselves to the stone, here is a proof which all fishers of experience will recognize: young pearl oysters are usually found in vast multitudes, packed closely together. Several bushels of them will frequently be attached to a single stone, filling up all hollows in a compact mass. It is perfectly evident that they cannot continue to grow that way, but must, as they increase in size, loosen themselves and shift elsewhere. But it is very certain that an oyster the size of a sixpence is as firmly bound to the stone, in proportion to its strength, as is another the size of a soup-plate; *ergo*, if the small ones have power to move (as we know they do), the large ones must be able to exercise a like locomotion. Moreover, if at certain times of the year a man should gather from any coral shoal all the discoverable pearl oysters, and yet in a week or two return there (especially after a gale of wind), he would again find in that place shells which had made their appearance during his absence from the neighbouring caves and hollows of the rocks. I have long been of opinion that the pearl oyster of the coral lagoons is not spawned altogether within the lagoon, but chiefly in the deep sea outside, for the reason that if any man will go, between the months of December and March (which seems in the Pacific to be the breeding season with many marine creatures), and stand upon the outer edge of a flat reef, on the windward side of any pearl lagoon, when the tide is making, he will observe the water to be everywhere full of young pearl oysters no bigger than his finger-nail, and others much less, all floating in towards the still water of the lagoon, where, having arrived, they sink to the bottom and settle down for life. Again, when the tide is going out, they are not seen to return to the ocean with it; neither, if a man will go and watch upon the lee reef, will he find any of them being carried over there. This has proved to me that the savages tell the truth—though the white men are not willing to believe them—when they say that if a diver could get down and work under the breaker, on the outside of the coral reef, he would find there even more shell than is to be found in the lagoon.

Of all the islands of the South Pacific, with the exception of the San Pablo, of Magalhaens (no doubt the same to which Cook gave the name of "Palmerston"), the Paumotu were first known to European navigators. The earliest discovered was San Miguel Archangel, seen by Quiros in 1606. Others were visited by Le Maire, Schouten, and Jacob Roggewein; but it was not until the beginning of the reign of the present Queen Pomare that they became generally accessible to civilized man. So great was the dread entertained by mariners of the ferocity of their inhabitants, that when, some forty years ago, at the windward end of the Archipelago, the "Essex," whale ship, was struck and sunk by an infuriated fish, the crew preferred to make their way in their boats to the coast of Chili—a distance of over 3,000 miles—to risking their lives in the endeavour to reach the Society Islands through a region of reefs and shoals inhabited by merciless cannibals. Attention was first attracted to the pearl deposits of Paumotu by the shell which was obtained from thence by the natives of Tahiti, and used by them for all manner of domestic purposes. But little notice was taken of them until it came to the knowledge of merchants of Valparaiso that certain Romish missionaries, who had established themselves among the savages of Manga Reva (Gambier's Isles), had there obtained several parcels of valuable pearls. Their avarice was immediately stimulated, and several vessels were despatched in search of these precious gems, with but ill success, for the traders soon discovered that pearls alone are not worth fishing for in that part of the world, but did not fail to perceive that the shell, or mother-of-pearl, was easily obtainable and extremely profitable, and so the trade flourished, and has continued with many fluctuations of the market up to this day. Various causes have of late years contributed to enormously increase its value, so that the profits of a pearl fishery are, at the present time, four times greater than they have ever been up to a few years past. Many fishers have made the remark: How is it that in these days we so seldom get hold of large pearls, when twenty years ago great numbers of them were to be found in the possession of the savages?

The agents of Messrs. Godeffroy on one occasion shipped to Europe, in one parcel, pearls to the value of 20,000 dollars, the product of a few months' collection among the Paumotu. Beachcombers,