

and ill-formed. There are other pearls which are found loose in the shell, and these are always of very fine quality, perfectly round, and very often large. If the shell be carelessly opened, such pearl, if it be in it, invariably falls out, being carried out by the beard in the agony of the fish when divided by the knife, and is thus almost sure to be ejected from the shell. Thus it has been that upon the Pacific fisheries by far the greater number of the most valuable of these gems have been irretrievably lost, for the reason that the natives, howsoever experienced, never look for a pearl elsewhere than in the muscle of the fish. They squat down on the sand, place the shell between their legs, stick in the knife, and wrench it open; and if there be one of these beard pearls (which are often worth a hundred of the others), down it slips into the sand, and is never seen; but as a rule not more than one oyster out of a thousand contains a pearl upon the beard.

Fine calm weather is of course most favourable to pearl fishing, but not indispensable, as the amphibious natives of some groups seek the shell by swimming with their heads below the surface of the water, and having discovered it, inhale a good draught of air, and then go down and fetch up as many as they can readily lay hold of. Polynesian divers do not use any stones to sink them, or any apparatus to close the nostrils, as do the Cingalese. They will stay under water about three minutes, sometimes longer, and can bring shell (if put to it) out of twenty fathoms. It requires some extra inducement to get them down that depth, and of course they cannot stick long at it, but Penrhyn islanders, Paumotans, or Rapa men, can do it if they like. Where shell is found at that depth, they are of enormous size, as much as eighteen inches in diameter, so that a pair, when opened out by the hinge, will measure a yard across. This work of pearl-diving is very hard, and the heat of the sun, aggravated by its radiation from the still water of the lagoons, is frightful. The divers rub their bodies with oil, otherwise their bronzed skin would peel off in huge blisters. On many islands women are more skilful at this work than men, as, being accustomed from early life to supply cockles and clams to the lords of the creation, they are the better divers.

They are paid in cloth—*i.e.*, cotton print—tobacco, hardware, and ornaments such as earrings, beads, dyed feathers, &c., and other articles of small trade too various to enumerate, the rates of payment not being by any means alike upon different islands, as also the articles of barter most greedily sought after in some fisheries not being in demand upon others, which necessitates a trading agent to have some previous knowledge of the various localities where the shell is obtainable, and of the especial likings of the natives, in order to drive a successful traffic. Under such circumstances, in the latest of my experience, the cost of raising shell amounts to the value of about £5 per ton. Many old fisheries out of which great profit has been made (such as Tuka, from whence Messrs. Hort Brothers, in 1856–57, obtained, inside of twelve months, 120 tons of shell, with fifteen Paumotu divers, and the help of the wives which they took to themselves upon the ground) are now supposed to be exhausted, or (as in the case of Mangarongo, where there has been for some time back an outcry about small shell) so far depreciated by constant fishing, and not giving them time to grow to maturity, as to be now of little value. This is a mistake in both instances; the best of the shell lies still in the deep water and in the great coral caverns underneath the exhausted shelves, from whence the savages, by judicious persuasion, can be easily induced to bring them to the surface. There are some lagoons in which any great quantity, and in some cases any shell whatever, is not supposed to exist, yet there is at those places a very considerable deposit, which has been overlooked for the reason that the fishers, not finding any in the shoal water, had not thought to look elsewhere. The shallow water at these places is skirted by sandy bays, in the neighbourhood of which (as I have said before) this fish will not live. Again, where the lagoons run into great bights, where there is no perceptible current, the shoal water is too hot for them; although in the deep hollows they exceedingly abound, but in such manner that they are not easy to be seen, unless a man goes down purposely to look for them. Pearl oysters are like sponges—certain conditions are necessary to their development; whereas in other localities, presenting apparently the same natural aspects, they are not found at all.

No. X.—SUNDAY ISLAND.

On the direct route between New Zealand and the Friendly Isles, and about half way, lie the Islands of Huon Kermadec, so called after that unfortunate French commander, who, in company with M. D'Entrecasteaux, was despatched in search of La Perouse. There are three islands—Raoul, or Sunday Island, Curtis, and Macauley. The two latter are not inhabitable, neither is it possible to land upon them. They are volcanic. Curtis Island discharges great quantities of steam which spouts out of the crevices of the rocks. Sunday Island is about the same distance N.E. of Auckland as Norfolk Island is to the N.W. It is available for settlement, and has been inhabited at divers times by people of European extraction. It is about twelve miles in circumference; the height is 1600 ft.; much of the soil is very rich, consisting of volcanic ashes and vegetable mould. The ground is warm in some places, so much so that in some spots food may be baked in it after the manner of an oven by simply burying it in the loose soil. Bananas and other tropical vegetables have been cultivated here with great success by the various families of beachcombers who have from time to time made a home upon it. It is at present deserted. The first little community of Sunday islanders consisted of three families of American whalers with Polynesian half-caste wives; their children were numerous, as likewise very handsome and very healthy. There are said to be three anchorages on Sunday Island. I only know one, which is towards the north, partly sheltered by a chain of islets and detached rocks. Here is a semicircular bay, in which the water shoals rapidly, with good holding ground. There is good landing on a sandy beach. Whalefish are plentiful about here at certain seasons. I saw here once a monstrous “veki” (*octopus*), which had been torn by them. Where these creatures are found, the sperm whale resort very much.

Very large turtle come up at this place; both the green kind and “hawkbill,” which is most valuable, the shell being usually sold at 5 dollars per lb. to the whale-ships and Sydney traders. It had always appeared to me a very strange mystery how it comes that this species of turtle (*hau kebile*), is almost never found (I might say never, since an instance does not occur once in a generation of men) westward, or as it is usually called in the Pacific to “windward,” of the 180th meridian of longitude or thereabouts. There it is always spoken of by the natives as the “honu no te opunga,” the turtle of the going down of the sun.