

Real and Artificial Facts About Pearls

IT is well known that pearls if not constantly worn, and if shut away from light and sunshine lose their charm and beauty, become, in fact, what experts call "sick." The first wife of the present Duke of Westminster wore her famous pearls day and night, until one sultry evening she discarded them and left them on the dressing-table. The gardener, decking out the bedroom balcony with flowers early next morning, evidently knowing a good thing when he saw it, stole them. Little good they did him, however, for he was unable to dispose of them, and was obliged to bury them on a suburban common.

Should you chance at any time to see a row of sick-looking pearls at a reasonable price, and you have anything of the gambler in your make-up, you might do worse than to buy them. Bathed in sea-water, and given liberal doses of sunshine, such pearls often grow well again and become of fabulous value.

A pearl is really built up of layer on layer of carbonate of lime, skin on skin, just like the layers of the so much more homely onion. One of the best ways to tell a real pearl from an artificial one is to test it with the teeth. If the pearl is smooth to the teeth, it is imitation; if it is gritty, it is the product of Nature. The wonderful iridescence is caused by the light playing on the thin layers of nacre of which the gem is built.

Some pearls are due to a tiny parasitic worm attacking the oyster which, in self-defence, wraps the worm in slime that duly hardens into nacre. Once the worm is imprisoned the oyster goes on adding coat after coat until in the course of years a pearl is formed. The parasite, however, is not always the cause of pearls in oysters. A grain of sand, a particle of mud, a bit of sponge, a piece of seaweed, a scrap of shell—all these are some of the things that have been found in pearls and adjudged to be the cause of them.

The beautiful blister pearls, so much used for pendants and rings, are really half-pearls, that the oyster has built round some foreign substance that has sought to invade the shell.

LONG ago, when the pearl fisheries of Japan were being over-fished and in danger of being wiped out, Mr. K. Mikimoto, member of the House of Lords in Japan and a scientist, endeavoured to breed and rear "tame" oysters, that would also be pearl-producing. Countless experiments were conducted, but after many failures came the most brilliant idea of all. It was to introduce a seed pearl or a grain of mother-o'-pearl into a covering of the mantle of an oyster and then insert this bodily, or so to speak, graft it, into the incision made in the mantle of another oyster. It meant sacrificing the life of one oyster to render another

Beneficent Electricity

Electrical and Radio Questions Discussed

A LARGE number of delegates attended the annual conference, in Wellington last week of the Electric Supply Authority Engineers' Association. Mr. H. F. Toogood, president, occupied the chair.

The report of the association stated that a special sub-committee had been set up to deal with the radio regulations, the importance of which was obvious. The question of earth leakage had been prominent during the year, and after intensive investigation by the Public Works Department, a proposed regulation had been drafted and would be finalised immediately after the conference. A sub-committee appointed to bring down a complete set of lift regulations would commence its work in the near future.

The report stated that the use of instantaneous water-heaters had had been considered further, but so far no action had been taken by the Public Works Department to protect supply authorities. It was believed that very valuable results would accrue to the country when the Department of Scientific Research Committee had completed its investigations into the

pearl-producing. First of all, only blister pearls were produced, but after twenty years experimenting, a free pearl was found that contained the nucleus inserted many years before.

To-day, a vast organisation exploits this idea. Millions of oysters are cultivated and grown on thousands of acres of sea-bed; miles of coast are leased for the purpose in the neighbourhood of Ago Bay, Omura Bay, and other places. At three years old, they are operated on by carefully-trained men, and such skill and delicacy are required to place the nucleus between the stomach and kidney of the pearl that no more than fifty oysters can be dealt with in a day by one man. In spite of this, and the enormous expense entailed, if three oysters in a hundred contained a free pearl seven to nine years after the operation, the crop of pearls was about fifteen times greater than from "wild" oysters. Now, owing to improved methods, the crop of pearls has been increased to twenty-five in a hundred, but if a pearl fisher finds even one first quality pearl in 500 oysters, he considers himself fortunate. A year after each oyster is operated upon, it is examined under X-rays, and if a failure is, of course, at once discarded. Consequently, to-day the pearl grower knows fairly accurately what the season's crop of pearls will be.

application of electricity to agriculture.

During the year the following authorities had withdrawn from membership:—Havelock North Town Board, Thames Borough Council, and Hawera County Electric Co. The Golden Bay and South Taranaki Power

Eventide

The day is done: and tillers of the
soil
Pled slowly home, a-weary from
their toil,
Repose to seek. Upon the drowsy
wold,
Like soothing balm to peacefully
enfold,
Comes grateful rest, where dark-
ness soon will grant
This short respite to man, and
beast, and plant,
Where darkness soon will hide
from human sight
The earth's grim scars beneath
the pall of night.
And as in life our mortal span
we reach,
When rest from strife and sad-
ness comes to each,
So fall the shades upon the trials
of day,
To vanish as the twilight fades
away,
And o'er the land the silence of
the tomb
Descends on us from night's en-
shrouding womb.
—J.R.

Boards had joined the association. The present membership stood at 76. The year ended with a balance of £326 2/10. Thus sum was nearly equal to the next year's anticipated expenditure. In view of the improved financial position, the application for a grant from the Power Boards' Association was reduced from £150 to £50.

The Farmer's Wife.

MR. H. F. TOOGOOD, president of the Electrical Supply Authority Engineers' Association, paid a just tribute to the farmer's wife. He said, in his address, that the farmer's wife faces her obligations as a mother, wife and home-builder better than any woman in the community, and with the greater disadvantage of obtaining domestic help only with much difficulty. Electric service, Mr. Toogood maintained, means much more to the farmer's wife than to the more fortunate woman in the closely-settled areas. He hoped that the association would most heartily support any movement with the object of removing the disadvantage under which the rural authorities labour regarding bulk electric supplies pur-

chased from the Public Works Department.

Expansion Necessary.

MR. TOOGOOD urged that in view of the growing business of many of the authorities, extra capital expenditure on investment of profits in extensions was necessary. The time was therefore opportune to review thoroughly the regulations before this phase of development was too far advanced. The Public Works Department had apparently realised this also, and was preparing for a revision.

IN New Zealand the small rural authorities pay the highest prices for bulk electric supplies, and no effort is made by giving cheaper current or monetary aid to assist them to serve the sparsely-populated districts, complained Mr. Toogood. The Ontario Government, in contrast, subsidises rural reticulation schemes to the extent of 50 per cent. of the capital cost of lines in the same manner as the New Zealand Government subsidises the cost of road construction in the backblocks. The Ontario Provincial Government is prepared to assist rural consumers by making grants to the Hydro-Electrical Commission for loss in revenue due to lower rates for current to such consumers. "Until the initial impost of £2 per k.v.a. imposed in New Zealand has been removed it cannot be said it is the policy of the Public Works Department to make serious effort to help backblock settlers to obtain current," said Mr. Toogood, "but rather by their methods of charging they are actually imposing some restriction on rural development."

"Catch 'em Early."

MR. TOOGOOD said that their first difficulty is in inducing the householder to accept electric service, and this is primarily because of the cost of the necessary equipment. The case of a new house is different, because with electric service other ex-

(Concluded on page 40.)

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