

shark-skin drum, and they get up and dance upon the smooth white sand by the light of the broad bright moon until the night is far spent, when they all go to rest, to wake again at daydawn with the sea-birds—just as happy and as innocent in their lives as they. Of course all is not sunshine and moonbeam at all times in the lives of beche-de-mer fishers. Many terrible tragedies have taken place among parties engaged in this pursuit; but in the majority of cases, throughout those islands of the South Pacific inhabited by the copper-coloured race of Polynesians, the preponderance of the blame has been on the side of the white man, and, in the most instances, other men's wives have been at the bottom of the mischief. Also, it has frequently occurred that Europeans, destitute of honor or humanity, have hired simple islanders, both men and women, for beche-de-mer fishing, and when their work was done, left them destitute in strange places, or sold them for slaves, or brutally ill-treated them for small occasion. One cannot wonder that the judgment of God should seem to cleave in some shape to this sort of scoundrels, who very usually wind up with a violent death, as did happen in half-a-dozen cases of which I had personal knowledge—Joe Bird, Jules Tirel, Joachim Gauza, Aaron Symons, Paddy Cooney, and Captain Daggett, who is reported to have been killed last year on the Island of Tanna.

Beche-de-mer is a wrinkled slimy creature, of precisely the appearance of a gigantic snail. When disturbed he swells himself up very considerably, and takes in a great quantity of water, which greatly increases his size. He is also elastic to such a degree that if one of them be slung by the middle across a pole, he will, by his own weight, stretch to several times his normal length. His shape is that of a cucumber; the red kind is seldom more than a foot long. Beche-de-mer is found upon coral shoals, where the water is not more than knee-deep at low tide. The most expeditious mode of collection is to make a little flat-bottomed punt of boards, or a small canoe dug out of a hollow log. (Upon most desert isles is a species of banyan tree, called "buka," of which the wood is very soft and buoyant, and consequently very well adapted to this purpose.) This constitutes an excellent mode of conveyance, as the fisher trails it behind him with a rope as he walks along the reef, and throws the slugs into it as fast as he can pick them up, and when the punt is loaded, tows it away to the edge of the deeper water, where he discharges his cargo into the larger boats which are used in the fishery. When the usual quantity of slug has been collected, the large boat is steered for home, and on the way the boat's crew employ themselves in gutting the fish. This is done by splitting up the whole length of the underside of the creature with a sharp knife, which is done over the gunwale, so that the intestines slip out into the sea. These intestines are apparently full of nothing but water and fine sand; they are transparent, about the thickness of a goose quill, and of great length. (I have often thought from their appearance that they might be utilized for the making of catgut, and perhaps isinglass.) When the boat arrives at the landing-place the fish must be taken on shore and cooked immediately, for a special reason. It is a remarkable peculiarity of this creature, that if a number of them be placed together, as long as they retain life they can be separated, although by reason of their plasticity they adopt their form to that of any substance with which they may be in contact after being taken out of the water, but shortly after their intestines are removed they lose all resemblance to their original form, and amalgamate into one indistinguishable and indivisible glutinous mass of the appearance and consistency of bird-lime, of which no use can be made, inasmuch as it adheres to whatsoever it touches with the tenacity of glue. There are several ways of preparing it for curing. The most primitive is to steam it in a Maori oven of hot stones. This is made by scooping out a large hole in the earth, in which the fire is made of small wood piled on its ends, cocoa-nut, husks, &c. Over this the stones are heaped, intermixed with more wood and husks. Hard stones are preferred, when obtainable, as they hold the heat better than coral, and do not become calcined. When they are thoroughly hot, they are spread out over the bottom of the hole, the fish is laid upon them as close as it will lie, and covered up first with large green leaves, then with "nikau" mats, and finally with a mound of earth. This is the orthodox Polynesian method of cooking everything.

I have already mentioned that, in preparing beche-de-mer, it is necessary to exercise caution, so as not to permit the liquor which is contained in its inside to get into the eyes or any abrasion of the skin, otherwise great pain and annoyance will result. After the beche-de-mer has been in the oven a sufficient time (which need not be more than an hour), it may be removed to the smoke-house. The steaming process has considerably altered its appearance; its size is reduced, and it has lost its sliminess. It looks like a piece of boiled cowheel or bacon rind of a dark colour. It is usual at this stage to spread out each separate slug by means of spanners—i.e., little bits of stick inserted transversely into the under side, which have the effect of keeping it flat and preventing it from curling up during the curing process, so that it dries up more rapidly and completely. It is then laid upon the drying stages, and fires are lighted underneath it of damp and sappy wood, in order to produce a dense and pungent smoke, which is well confined by closing up the building with "pakau," that is to say, coarse mats of "nikau" (by which I do not mean the "nikau" tree of New Zealand, but the term which is applied by the South Sea Islanders to the leaf of the cocoa palm). By this plan the beche-de-mer, if a strong smoke be kept up, will cook effectually in forty-eight hours, or, at the outside, in three days. It must be turned at least once. (I have said nothing about taking out the teeth, as practised by some, for the reason that it is wholly unnecessary; they dry up to the consistence of chalk, and do not affect the value of good beche-de-mer in any degree.) Another method of preparation is by boiling it in the great try-pots which are used by the whale-fishers. It is boiled twice in salt water, about ten minutes each time. This is the more expeditious way of cooking, but it necessitates a longer smoking, as it will not cure thoroughly after it in less than eight days, and after all never resists the damp so well as that which has been steamed in the oven. A third and most effective system is to put the beche-de-mer into a hogshead or close box, into which a steam pipe is introduced from a boiler. This is a very expeditious plan, and most to be recommended. When sufficiently smoke-dried, the fish is packed into strong baskets of nikau, which it is not desirable to have stitched up until the time of shipment, for the reason that it is advisable to occasionally spread it out, so as to give it the advantage of a thorough scorching in the hot sun, and to give opportunity to pick out any soft or imperfectly cured sample. It must be borne in mind that its preservation depends entirely on its being thoroughly dried. Beche-de-mer, when properly cured, should be of the consistency of sole leather; and unless this result is attained, it is the most precarious kind of merchandise to deal in. The ultimate destiny