

Surely his lines are cast in pleasant places, and his existence might be one of unalloyed happiness; nevertheless, he has his afflictions. Some facetious writer speaks of an oyster as being "crossed in love." I know not how that may be, but this I have observed, that almost all well-grown pearl-oysters are infested by parasites in the shape of a scarlet lobster, about the size of a shrimp. This pestilent intruder introduces himself into the shell in conjunction, as it appears, with the partner of his joys, and making themselves a bed under the fat, soft body of their victim, resisting all attempts to dislodge them, rear their interesting progeny, and cause no end of pain and annoyance. The true cause of the production of pearls is, I believe, not known. It is supposed by many to be a disease in the fish; I am inclined to this opinion, and will state my reasons. In the first place, wheresoever a pearl fishery is found of which the oysters grow to great size, with a clean, smooth, outer surface, free from knots, humps, worm holes, or other blemishes, in fact presenting every appearance of healthy and uninterrupted development (which is particularly noticeable in lagoons where the shells be wide apart), there will the pearls be extremely scarce; so much so that it would not pay to prosecute such a fishery for the profit to be derived from the pearls alone, although the shell is proportionately more valuable. On the other hand, where shells are closely crowded together, deformed by pressure, abnormally thickened about the base, having laminae of which their outside is composed forced at their edges into an unnatural contact, so as to induce a belief that their growth had been stunted, as likewise being studded with warts and knots of a scabby appearance, being moreover honeycombed with small worm-holes which penetrate more or less deeply into the nacre—there will pearls most exceedingly abound. It is not uncommon for as many as a hundred pearls to be found in such a shell, though the presumption is that where they exist in such great numbers, very few, and frequently none whatever, will possess any market value. But of the presence of the conditions necessary to the production of a pearl inside of an oyster there is one very significant and certain sign, the faculty of detecting which can only be acquired by practice. While the fish is alive, the two flat surfaces which appear at the back of the hinge present very beautiful prismatic colours; the cable which attaches it to the rock is in like manner remarkable. When the shell contains pearls, the prevailing colours of these portions is, while in vigorous life (as when just removed from the waters), a certain shade of bronze, brilliant but evanescent, which is not easy to describe, but very easy to be recognized by the experienced fisher. By this means a man well used to the work will, with great certainty, pick out from a boat-load of living oysters at least 75 per cent. of those which contain pearls.

In the Pacific, all oysters are opened by the knife, which, if carefully performed, is the best plan. The best instrument for this purpose is a common table knife of good steel ground thin until the blade is flexible, and fitted into a stout handle. A skilful operator will open a ton of shells in an ordinary day's work, and not miss the pearls if there be any. It cannot be done rapidly without frequently cutting the hands (sometimes seriously), as the edges are as sharp as glass. But men working for themselves, with a prospect of considerable gain, do not mind such accidents. The excitement is like that of gold-mining. White men, well up to this work, will never (if they can avoid it) allow valuable shells to be opened by any other hands than their own, as the Kanakas are sure to steal them if they have an opportunity, and so skillful are they in concealing them, that it is very difficult to detect them in the act. It was thus that the pearl deposit of Tapeapaahua was discovered. Upon the lee reef of this place—which is a great coral atoll of 50 miles in circumference, nowhere more than 15 feet above the level of high water—about fifteen years ago there went ashore a New Bedford whale ship called the "Gem." There were some strange circumstances connected with the loss of this vessel, which, however interesting, would occupy too much space in an article of this kind. It is enough to say that Messrs. Hort Brothers, of Tahiti, despatched one of their vessels to the scene of the wreck in order to pick up whatever it was possible to recover, for she was full of sperm oil, and the copper and other material obtainable was of considerable value. The parties engaged in this venture anchored their vessel in the interior lagoon, and remained several weeks collecting the oil casks and burning the wreck in order to get out the boats and what else might have been worth saving. Their crew consisted of Tahitians and Paumotu men. During their stay these were allowed unlimited liberty to go a-fishing, and in their spare time to amuse themselves as they pleased. One day the captain's attention was attracted to a violent quarrel going on among the Paumotans upon the ship's fore-castle. Upon his going forward the row subsided, and he observed one of them endeavouring to conceal something in the corner of his maro, or girdle he wore about his loins. On being questioned as to what this might be, he replied "tobacco"—a palpable falsehood, for the reason that being well supplied with that article, they could have no need to quarrel about or conceal it. Being laid hold of by the captain he presently swallowed the substance which constituted the cause of contention—which the master perceiving, he dragged him to the quarterdeck and administered a dose of tartar emetic, after which, in the process of casting up his accounts, he brought to light a large and valuable pearl. An investigation followed, in the course of which the captain learned what he was previously ignorant of, that his anchor was down upon a coral shoal, thickly covered with pearl shell of great size and splendid quality. He never reported the matter to his owners, but concealed his knowledge of this precious deposit until several years after. Having got a small vessel of his own, he engaged a number of Penrhyn islanders to fish for him at this place, under the supervision of a European, who, however, finding some cause of contention with his men, was by them murdered and thrown into the sea, and the fishery became deserted, as it is to this day.

When the shells are landed, the usual custom of the *boss* fisherman is to sort them into two piles, such as he supposes to contain pearls to be opened by himself, the rest by the natives. The empty shells ought to be at once placed under a shed to protect them from the rays of the sun, and so preserve their beautiful colours. In hard times it is usual for men to eat the fish which comes out of the pearl shell, cooking the residue in an oven of stones, and then drying them in the sun; but they are coarse, rank, and disagreeable as food, though perfectly wholesome. The pearls are usually lodged in the rong muscle of the fish, out of which the *cable*, as it is called, springs. This is about the thickness of that part of a man's hand which is next to the thumb. The flesh being semi-transparent, the pearls are at once seen from their brightness, which refracts the light. Their presence is easily detected; sometimes they exist in great numbers in one fish, but in such case they are generally small