

also, who had been daring enough to land upon remote lagoon isles, and had managed to escape the ovens of the cannibals, frequently realized great sums of money by the sale of parcels of these gems, which, as a general rule, they disposed of for much less than their worth, which they were unable to truly estimate. Such was the case with Joe Bird, of Mangarongaro, who was known to have made over 6,000 dollars in this way, a great part of which was found in his chest by his wives, who divided it among them, after he had been put to death by his own men. In like manner Harry Williams, of Manihiki, amassed silver coin until he had as much as nearly filled a powder keg, which one day, in a drunken fit, he broke to pieces with an axe, and scattering the contents upon the sand, told the savages among whom he lived to take as much as they wanted, which they presently did, carrying the treasure off to their houses, crying, "Aué, aué! the white man has gone mad, and broken the barrel in which he kept his gods; shall we give them back to him? Oh, no! Let the white man go and find more." So, many people have asked the question, "How was it that pearls of value were so much more plentiful in former years?" There is a way of accounting for it; in part by the fact that, on every new fishery, the great shells are found in the shoal water to an extent which is never afterwards possible while the fishery continues to be frequented, and also for this reason, that the savages had been hoarding them. Not from hope of gain, for they had no such knowledge, but from superstition; thus, in every village was a house specially built and set apart wherein they kept their gods, or what answered the purpose of such. In this place it was customary to make offerings of the largest of everything they found (as well as whatsoever was new and strange to them), as the largest cocoa-nut, crab, fish of any kind, shell, or pearl: these things were made sacred, and hung up in this building; small articles, such as pearls, teeth of dead men, teeth and claws of animals, were enclosed in little bags, and carefully stowed away. Thus these places might be likened to a sort of museum, in which everything rare and curious had been preserved from generation to generation from an unknown time; and when communion with white men began to slacken their faith in their ancient devil-worship, much of what was really precious among these strange collections fell into the possession of the first strolling ruffian who was bold enough to land and live among them.

Many men in those days lost their lives in this trade, and others made themselves notorious for their evil deeds in connection with it—notably one Captain Rugg, who made a practice of cruising round the Paumotus, and wheresoever he found a quantity of shell ready for shipment, seizing it by armed force.

This man finally reaped the just reward of his misdeeds; for, having had the assurance to fire into the "Dolphin," an American vessel of war, to which he had declined to render an account of himself, he was, by the "Porpoise," one of the same squadron, chased into the North Pacific, and there sunk with all his crew.

In those days the yield of pearl shell of the Paumotu was enormous, and its value comparatively low, though great profits were made in the traffic, the natives being barbarous and ignorant, inasmuch as they in some instances were willing to give 1,000 shells for an iron tomahawk, and for other articles of barter in the same proportion, which is still the case in some groups of the North Pacific into which civilization has not yet penetrated. Coming down to later times, it is probable that the yield of shell in the Paumotus twenty years ago amounted to about 1,000 tons annually, of which part found its way to Valparaiso, where agencies were established by European firms, some to Sydney, and a considerable proportion to China. As the aborigines became more intelligent, they demanded higher rates of remuneration. Cotton print and articles of luxury took the place of blue beads and hoop iron in their estimation. At the same time, new markets and uses being found for the product, its value considerably advanced.

Up to the present time we may very safely estimate the Paumotu Group has yielded to traders of various nations not less than 25,000 tons of pearl shell, representing, at the lowest rates which have ruled in Europe since the trade attracted any great attention, over £1,000,000.

The Paumotu fisheries are now frequently represented as exhausted. This is not true, although the quantity obtainable probably does not exceed 200 tons during the year. The reason is obvious. The pearl oyster requires seven years to arrive at maturity, and in the Paumotus they have been allowed no rest during the greater part of the last thirty years. As they are exceedingly prolific if allowed reasonable time to recruit, they would soon recover their former flourishing condition. But I do not point to the Paumotus (which are an appanage of France) as a special field of enterprise for the merchants of New Zealand. I simply desire to give a few well-authenticated instances of profits which have been made there (and how), in order to show what amount of success may be anticipated in the prosecution of similar ventures upon other pearl islands which have either never been entered by fishers, or have lain dormant for a great number of years.

NO. VII.—THE PAUMOTU GROUP.

The islands of the Paumotus consist, for the most part, of low coral, usually not more than 30 feet above the level of high water (frequently much less), covered with a vegetation stunted and wiry, consisting chiefly of Pandanus (screw palm), with patches of cocoa-nut and the remains of groves of gigantic tomano. I say the remains, for the reason that this wood has from all time been in great request for the construction of canoes, and consequently was accounted very valuable. It seems incredible how in times past, before the introduction of iron into this region, the savages contrived to work it, as in hardness it is equal to mahogany; and the sight of the enormous stumps which remain in many places bears striking testimony to the patient ingenuity of the barbarian artificers, who with axes of stone were able to cut down and hew into shape so intensely hard a material. On many low coral atolls trunks of these trees are still to be seen from 10 to 15 feet in diameter, which, though long ago denuded of their monstrous limbs, are still green and solid, covered with verdant shoots. Their appearance is very beautiful, the leaves being dark and glossy, the size of a man's hand, of a form and colour like that of a laurel. The flowers are small and of a waxen whiteness, growing in large clusters highly odoriferous, out of which the savages extract, by a rude process, a strong scent wherewith to perfume their bodies. The seed is of the size and perfect roundness of a billiard ball. The