

went off in the cutter and did not return till noon. I noticed that only a few pearl oyster shells had been stored in the hut. I saw no signs of a diver's apparatus or of the small nets used by the divers to bring up the shells. There was an air of constraint upon Chapman out of harmony with the man I had known in Brisbane.

The Malays did not speak English, and even if they had, I doubt whether I should have been able to extract any information from them. They were devoted to Chapman and evidently could be relied upon in an emergency.

Daily when Chapman returned I looked in the bottom of the cutter but saw no pearl oysters.

"The fishing must be poor," I said one day.

"Months are frequently spent in searching for new beds," Chapman answered.

"Do you bring the oysters here when you find them?" I inquired.

"No, the stench would be unbearable, we have to let them decay before we can search for the pearls."

When my leg improved I wondered that I was not invited to accompany my host in his daily trips, but he gave no sign. A week slipped by and I was beginning to discuss how I was to get away from the perch, as I had grown to call it, when the natives came down to the shore, late in the afternoon and made signs, which immediately threw the Malays and Chapman into a violent state of excitement. Rifles were loaded and a plentiful supply of ammunition lowered into the cutter. When all was ready Chapman turned to me and said: "Don't be alarmed, one of my stations is in danger of being looted. I must teach these savages the rights of private property."

I immediately volunteered my service.

"No, no," was the answer, "A wounded man would only be in the way, you have already paid dearly enough for your visit without getting another taste of bamboo."

As the cutter drew away I noticed that all the Malays had accompanied Chapman, leaving me to guard the house. At one end of the platform, on which the house was built, rested a medium sized canoe, made from a single log. The cutter soon swept around the point and was lost to view. I listened attentively for half an hour, then there floated across the head-land a faint echo of firearms, the battle had evidently begun. Fainter and fainter grew the sounds and after five minutes they died away in the distance. I watched for the return of the victors but they never came. That night I did not