

About Pearls

You have all seen beautiful pearls. They are not dug out of the mines, as are diamonds, rubies and amethysts.

They are of animal formation. They are found in the shell of the pearl oyster.

This oyster is really not at all like our ordinary oyster. It is supposed that a tiny grain of sand, or an unhatched egg becomes lodged between the mantle and the shell of the oyster. It has not the power to remove the foreign particle, and so it covers it with the glistening fluid secretion from the mantle called nacre. This nacre hardens and each year adds a fresh layer to the substance, and thus a beautiful pearl is formed by an accident, just as in life, what we often think a dreadful calamity may turn out beautifully and wonderfully for our own good and benefit.

The Chinese have a very clever way of making use of this habit of the pearl oyster.

They put bits of sand and little images into the oyster shells and leave them for years; when taken out they are beautifully coated with the pearly substance.

It is the nacre spreading over the entire shell which makes the pretty mother-of-pearl used in making ornaments.

All oysters have not as plainly colored shells as those we use for food. The color of the shells depends upon the action of the light and the depth of the water, and in warm countries we find oysters and mussels with highly colored shells.

Diving for pearl is hard work. Most of the pearl oysters are found in the waters near Ceylon.

The divers can only stay under water a couple of minutes. In this time they gather up quantities of the oysters and bring them to the surface.

They are left on the banks, carefully secured by being placed in walled compartments, until the soft body of the oyster decays, and then the pearls are easily found. Some are loose; these are more costly than those which have to be partly spoiled by being cut off from the shell.

Pearls are of great value, hence the pearl fisheries are carefully guarded to prevent any stealing.

The Shah of Persia is said to have the most valuable collection of pearls in the world.

A Fire that brought Fortune.

British gum was discovered through the burning of a starch factory near Chapelizod in 1841. Some calico printers who, in assisting to extinguish the flames, had been plentifully bedewed with the starch which the torrents of water had washed into the highway, found on attempting to remove their clothes that they adhered to their limbs as though they had been saturated with glue, and on returning to the scene of the fire found the ground covered with puddles of a glutinous mixture.

Some of this they took away, and using it in their trade in the place of the gum-arabic usually employed, found that it answered as well. They ultimately sold their secret for a small sum to a gentleman who turned it to a much more profitable account, it being applied, among other purposes, to the service of the penny postage when first introduced for rendering the stamps adhesive.