

THE THREE GREAT PEARLS.

A NEW GUINEA STORY.

At the Queensland National Club, Brisbane, I made the acquaintance of an Englishman, Leonard Chapman, who fascinated me. I can describe the charm of his manner, his fund of information, and the originality of his conversation in no other terms. He had travelled extensively and possessed a thorough knowledge of the South Pacific. Chapman was not over thirty-five years of age, he spent his money with a lavish hand, even for that lavish country, and I learned from some of his acquaintances that he paid Brisbane an annual visit, and that he was engaged in pearl fishing in Torres Straits, off the north coast of Queensland. No one appeared to know the precise locality. His appearance was striking in the extreme. No taint of the beach-comber hung about the man. On the contrary, he reminded me of a College professor out for a holiday. His fund of anecdotes was unlimited, yet he was as modest and unassuming as he was undoubtedly brilliant. From the tenor of his conversation I gathered that he took a special interest in scientific discoveries and inventions, and I soon learned that he had not only read of the nineteenth century marvels, but possessed a thorough knowledge of the means by which they were wrought. I inclined to the opinion that he had devoted many years to the study of chemistry, but he was equally conversant with the principles of electricity and of molecular research. So varied were his gifts and so accurate his knowledge, combined with originality, that I marvelled he should bury himself on an island in a half-known sea, for I gathered that his was an island home. So startling were his views relative to changes to come in the near future that there were times when I sat spell-bound. He held that science would extract nitrogen from the air by a simple and inexpensive