

Drawn by Otto H. Bacher

PEARL OYSTERS

THE LURE OF THE PEARL

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WITH PICTURES FROM THE AUTHOR'S PHOTOGRAPHS

THE bed of the Gulf of Manar, the arm of the Indian Ocean that separates Ceylon from India, has given the world more pearls than all other fisheries combined, for it has been prolific as a pearling-ground for thousands of years. Pearling in the gulf was an occupation hoary with age before the dawn of Christianity, for history tells us that Mardis, admiral of Alexander the Great, when returning from a voyage having to do with the Indian invasion, traversed the strait separating Ceylon from the continent, and was informed of the importance of the pearl-banks over which his fleet was passing. The great sailor was specially interested in the manner of drilling the holes in pearls for stringing, which was probably the same that it is to-day.

In the exuberant phraseology of the Orient, Ceylon is "the pearl-drop on India's brow," and the Gulf of Manar is "the sea abounding in pearls" and "the sea of gain." Ceylon appeals irresistibly to any possessor of the wandering foot, for it is an island paradise. It is well governed, of course, for its administration is that of a seasoned colony

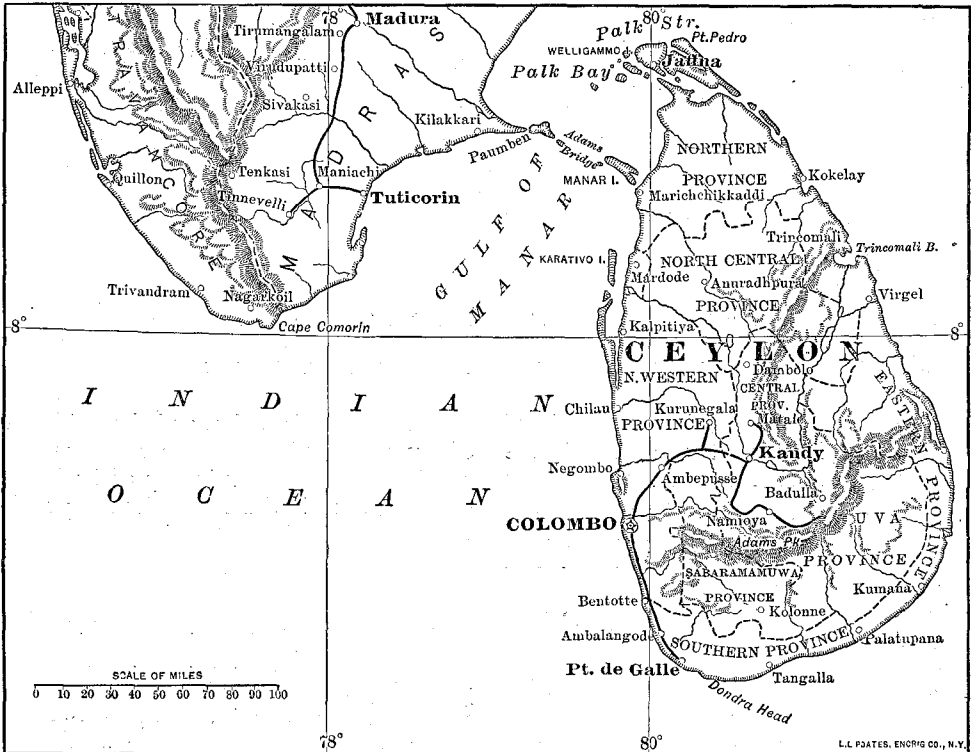
of Edward VII's realm, and the guidance of austere, dignified Britain countenances nothing like gambling in any of its lands—oh, dear, no! State lotteries are pretty well relegated in these times to Latin countries, as everybody knows.

Yet the world's most gigantic gamble, pregnantly fruitful with chance in all variations and shadings, is unquestionably the Ceylon pearl-fishery; compared with it, any state lottery pales to insignificance. From the taking of the first oyster to the draining of the last vatful of "matter," every step is attended by fickle fortune; and never is the interest of the people of Portugal or of Mexico keener over a drawing of a lottery, the tickets of which may have been sold at the very thresholds of the cathedrals, than is that of the natives of Ceylon and southern India over the daily results of a Manar fishery.

Each bivalve is a lottery ticket; it may contain a gem worthy of place in a monarch's crown, or be a seed pearl with a mercantile value of only a few rupees. Perhaps one oyster in a hundred contains a pearl, and not more than one pearl in a hundred, be it known, has a value of importance. Nature furnishes the sea, pearling-banks, oysters, and all therein

contained; the Ceylon administration conducts the undertaking, and for its trouble and trifling outlay exacts a "rake-off" of two thirds of all that may be won from the deep. And mere man, the brown or black diver, receives for his daring and enterprise one oyster in every three that he brings from the ocean's depths—and his earnings must be shared with boat-owner, sailors, attendants, and assistants almost without number.

who intimately knows the habits of the pearl-oyster of the East, advances two interesting if not startling premises. One is that the pearl is produced as a consequence of the presence of the dead bodies of a diminutive parasitical tapeworm which commonly affects the Ceylon bivalve. The living tapeworm does not induce pearl formation. The popular belief has been that the pearl was formed by secretions of nacre deposited upon a grain



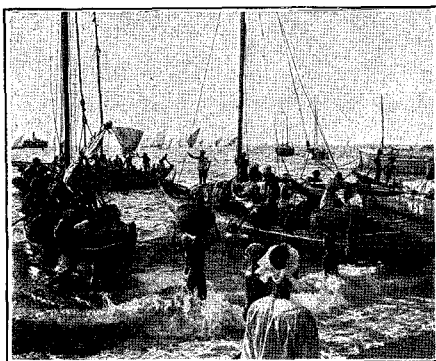
MAP OF THE GULF OF MANAR, "THE SEA ABOUNDING IN PEARLS"

For size of "rake-off," there is no game of hazard in the world offering a parallel. The Ceylon government used to exact three out of every four oysters brought in, the current tribute of two out of three having become operative only a few years since.

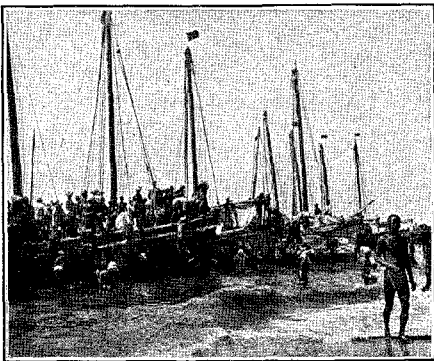
It should be known that the pearl-bearing oyster of the Indian Ocean is only remotely related to the edible variety of America and Europe. It is the *Mar-garitifera vulgaris*, said to belong to the animal kingdom, and not to the fish family, and is never eaten. The eminent marine biologist in the service of the Ceylon government, Professor Hornell,

of sand or other foreign particle drawn within the oyster through its contact with the sea's bottom. The other Hornell assertion is that the oyster goeth and cometh at its pleasure; that it is mobile and competent to travel miles in a few weeks.

Scientists have long been aware that the pearl shell-fish possesses locomotive powers, which it uses when in quest of food or protection, and to escape impure localities. During the Dutch occupation of Ceylon, for example, there was a period of several years when the oysters' boycott of the Manar banks was virtually unanimous.



PEARL FISHING FLEET RACING FOR PLACES



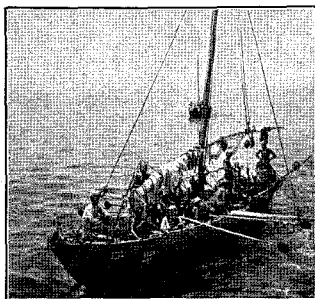
A BUSY TIME ON THE BEACH



SCENE AT THE PEARL BANKS



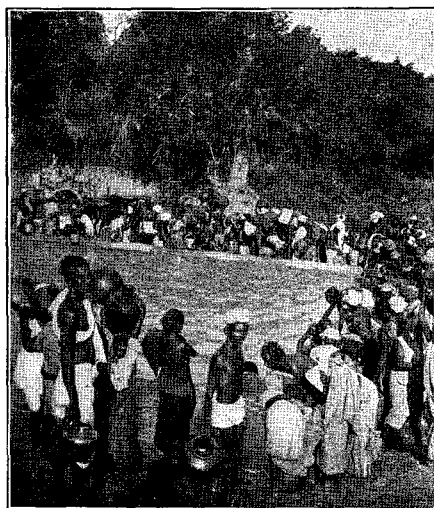
COOLIE AND DIVER



DIVING BOAT CHANGING ANCHORAGE



PEONS DRINKING



WOMEN AT THE PUBLIC POOL



Drawn by Corwin K. Linson. Half-tone plate engraved by C. W. Chadwick

DIVING BOAT, AND DIVERS RESTING IN THE WATER BEFORE DESCENDING

It is an accepted fact that pearls are excretions of superimposed concentric *laminae* of a peculiarly fine and dense substance, consisting in major part of carbonate of lime. Linnaeus, believing in the possibility of producing pearls by artifice, suggested the collecting of mussels, piercing holes in their shells to produce a wound, and bedding them for five or six years to give pearls time to grow. The Swedish government succeeded in producing pearls of a sort by this process; but as they were of trifling value, the experiments were discontinued.

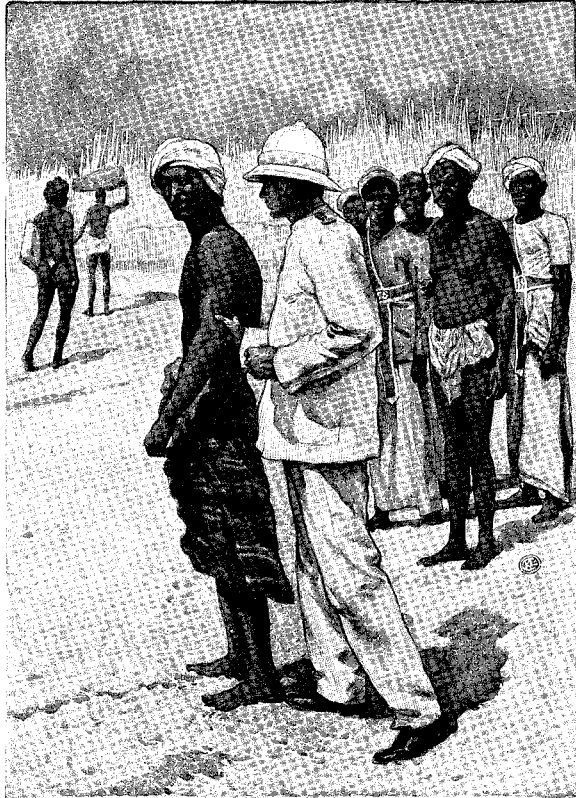
Cunning Chinese and Japanese have sought of late years to assist or improve on nature's pearl-making methods by inserting tiny shot or grains of sand between the mantle and the shell, which in time become coated with nacre. Not long since there was a movement in

Japan to embark in pearl production upon a basis wholly commercial, and its promoters discussed it as they might a project for supplying a city with vegetables. One of the claims of those exploiting the venture was that they could keep pace with fashion's changes by supplying pearls of any shape, pear, oval, or spherical. This has been accomplished in other countries, and European and American dealers have had years of acquaintance with the "assisted" pearl, a showy and inexpensive counterfeit, but one attaining to no position in the realm of true gems. The dis-

tinction between fine pearls and these intrusive nacre-coated baubles, alluringly advertised as "synthetic pearls," has been demonstrated by more than one devotee of science.

There are definite rules for determining when a Ceylon fishery will be held, for twice a year the banks are systematically examined by the marine biologist,

and estimates made of the number of oysters present on each bank. Whenever their age and size appear to warrant the step, a sample catch of twenty thousand oysters is made by divers employed by the government, and a valuation is formed of the pearls they produce. If found to average ten or twelve rupees to a thousand oysters, the government is advised to proclaim a fishery. Advertisements are then published throughout the East, especially in vernacular

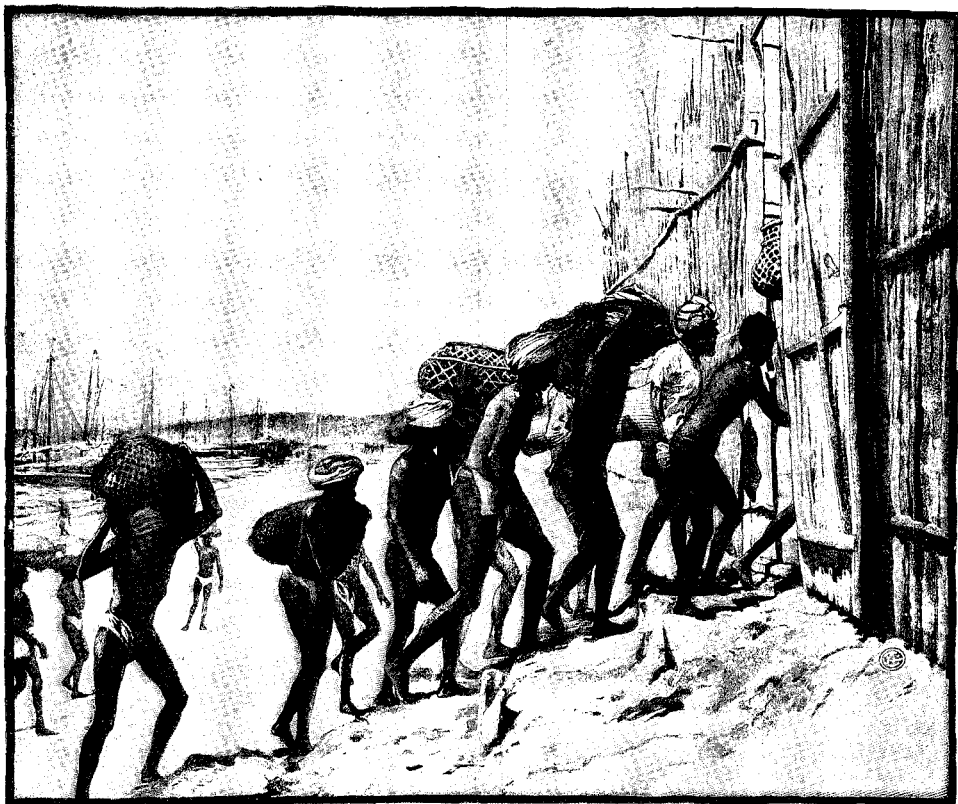


Drawn by Corwin K. Linson. Half-tone plate engraved by R. C. Collins

DIVER SUSPECTED OF PEARL-STEALING, UNDER ARREST

papers reaching the Persian Gulf and the two coasts of southern India, at the instance of the Colonial Secretary's office at Colombo. These detail the valuation of the sample pearls, area of beds to be fished, and the estimated number of oysters likely to be available upon each.

The advertisements are printed in Cingalese, Tamil, and English. As rapidly as information can spread, it becomes known from Karachi to Rangoon, and along the chain of sea-ports of the Malay states, that a fishery is to be held. Divers, gem-buyers, speculators, money-lenders, petty



Drawn by Corwin K. Linson. Half-tone plate engraved by S. Davis

COOLIES CARRYING PEARL OYSTERS FROM THE BOATS TO THE "KOTTU," OR GOVERNMENT STOCKADE

merchants, and persons of devious occupations, make speedy arrangements for attending. Indian and Cingalese coolies flock by the thousand to the coast of the Northern province, longing to play even humble rôles in the great game of chance. The "tindals" and divers provide boats and all essential gear for the work afloat; while ashore the government supplies buildings and various forms of labor for dealing with the curious industry.

It is during the calm period of the northeast monsoon,—February, March and April,—when the sea is flat and the sky is bright and unflecked, that the fishery is carried on. The line of banks—they are "paars," in the languages of Ceylon—cover an extensive submarine plateau off the island's northwest coast, from ancient Hippuros southward to Negombo. This is of flat-surface rock, irregularly carpeted with coarse sand, and dotted with colonies of millions of oysters. Dead coral and other products of the sea are scattered everywhere on this

plateau, and it is a theory that these surface interruptions prevent overcrowding of the oysters, and consequently assist the bivalve in reaching the pearl-producing stage. It is claimed that a crowded paar contributes to a stunting of growth, bringing disease and premature death to the oyster, and consequently no pearls of account.

The estimate of the experts upon which it was decided to announce a fishery last year was that there were on the Southwest Cheval paar 3,500,000 oysters which might be gathered, on the Mideast Cheval paar 13,750,000 oysters, on the North and South Moderagam 25,750,000, and on the South Cheval 40,220,000.

The announcement of this total of 83,000,000 bivalves produced an electrical effect, and an unprecedented attendance, for it was equal to announcing a lottery with that many tickets, and who knows how few prizes!

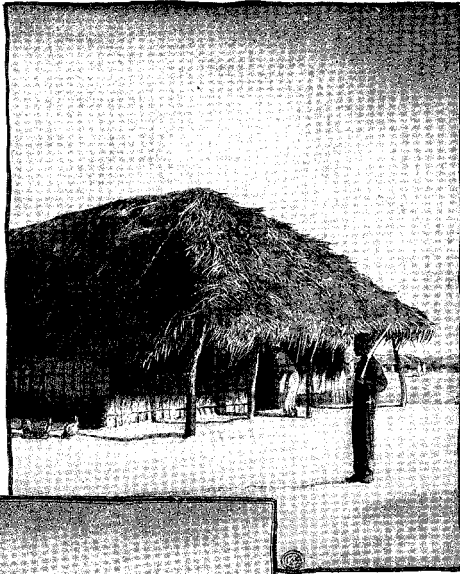
The student seeking to determine the eighth wonder of the world should not

overlook the city of Marichchikkaddi. Stories of towns rising overnight wherever gold is found, or diamonds discovered, or oil struck, have become common to the point of triteness. Tales of the uprising of Klondike and South African cities, once amazing, fade to paltriness in the opinion of one who has seen the teeming city of Marichchikkaddi. In a sense it is a capital, yet it is found in no geography; no railway connects it with the world, yet a dozen languages are spoken in its streets. Marichchikkaddi's population numbers no young children, no persons too aged to toil, and the four or five hundred women sojourners merit the right of being present through serving as water-carriers to camp and fishing fleet.

This place with double-mouthful name, almost defying pronunciation, is the pearl metropolis of the universe. Probably there is not a stocked jewel-case that does not contain gems that have been filtered through this unique city by the sea. For a dozen reasons it is a wonderful town, and the foremost of these is that it is the

only city of size that comes and goes like the tide's ebbing and flowing.

When a fishery is proclaimed, Marichchikkaddi is only a name—a sand-drifted waste lying between the jungle of the hinterland and the ocean. Yet nine-months before, forty thousand people dwelt here under shelter of roofs, and here the struggle for gain had been prosecuted with an earnestness that would have borne golden fruit in any city in the Western world. There, where lies the skeleton of



GOVERNMENT
TREASURY AND
GUARD



Drawn by Corwin K. Linson. Half-tone plate engraved by F. Levin

THE MAIN STREET OF MARICHCHIKKADDI

a jackal half-buried in sand, an Indian banker had his habitat and office only a few months before, with a lakh of rupees stacked in a conspicuous place as glittering earnest of his ability to pay well for anything remarkable in the way of a pearl. And beyond, where occurs the rift in the sand, stood the shanty in which venturesome divers whiled away time and money in trying to pitch rings upon the ends of



From a photograph. Half-tone plate engraved by H. Davidson

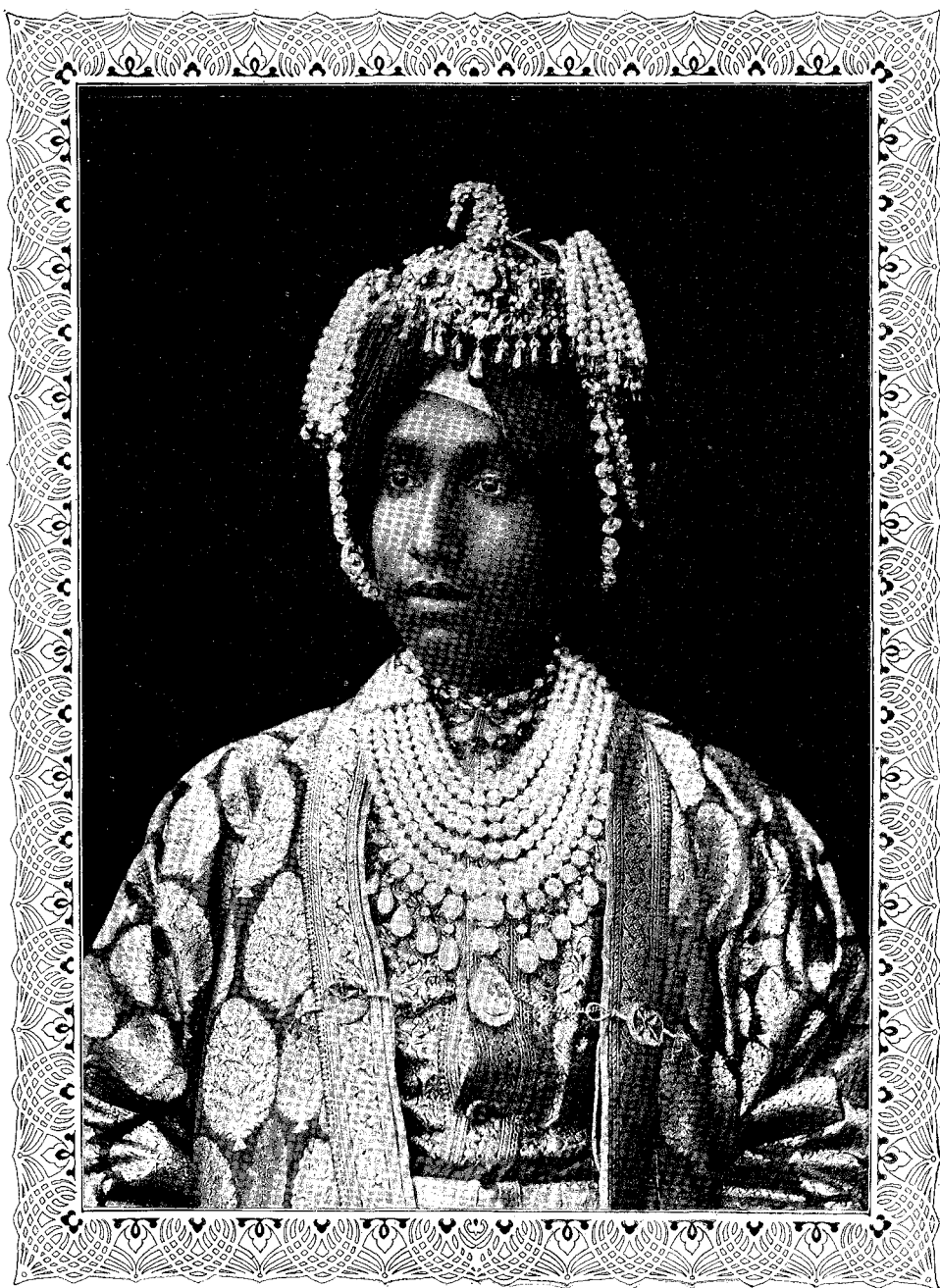
THE LATE RANA OF DHOLPUR IN HIS PEARL REGALIA

This Indian prince is said to have owned pearls valued at seven and a half millions of dollars, the accumulation, perhaps, of his ancestors during several centuries

walking-sticks, as do farmers' boys at New England county fairs.

Colombo is facetiously spoken of by Englishmen as the Clapham Junction of the East, for the reason that one can

there change to a steamer carrying him virtually to any place on the globe. But it is simpler for a white man to get to Melbourne, or Penang, or New York, from Colombo, than to obtain passage to

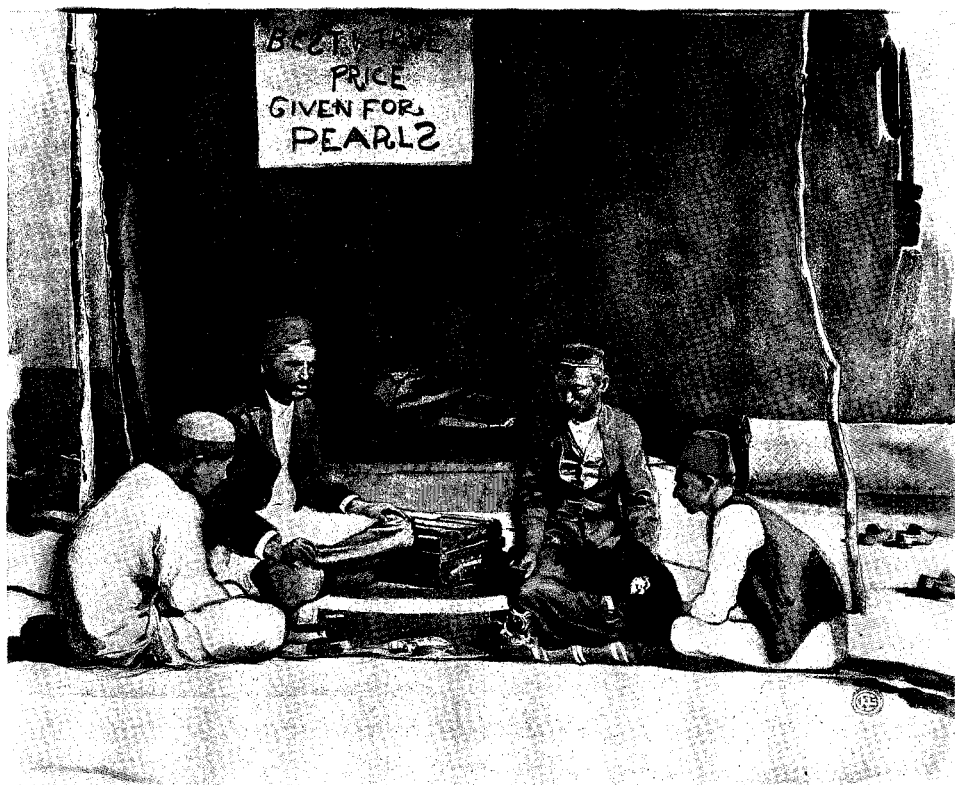


From a photograph. Half-tone plate engraved by H. Davidson

THE LATE MAHARAJAH OF PATIALA

Marichchikkaddi, only a hundred and fifteen miles up the coast. If he can wait long enough, passage may be found, of course; but otherwise all the official and editorial persuasion of Colombo availeth nothing. Now and then he may hear of

a speculative Parsee's dhow that may be going to Manar for a cargo of oysters, or of a native-owned launch that will carry a limited number of passengers at an unlimited fare. A fast-sailing outrigger canoe may always be



Drawn by Corwin K. Linson. Half-tone plate engraved by Robert Varley

INDIAN PEARL MERCHANTS READY FOR BUSINESS

chartered. Another opportunity is to travel two days by post-cart to a village one never heard of, transferring there to a bullock hackery that may take him through jungle roads to Marichchik-kaddi—provided he is able to give instructions in Tamil, or a college-bred coolie can be found who knows English. Still another way is to take the semi-weekly steamer from Colombo to Tuticorin, in southern India, then zigzag about the continent of Asia until he makes Paumben. Then it is a matter of only a few days when there will be a boat crossing to the pearl-camp. This is the surest way of getting to Marichchik-kaddi; but it is like making the journey from New York to Boston by way of Bermuda.

Ceylon's substitute for virtually everything elsewhere used in the construction of buildings is the cadjan: it is at once board, clapboard, shingle, and lath. Cadjans are plaited from the leaf of the cocoanut or date palm, and are usually

five or six feet long and about ten inches wide; the center rib of the leaf imparts reasonable rigidity and strength. Half the shelters for man and beast throughout the island are formed of cadjans, costing nothing but the making, and giving protection from the sun and a fair amount of security from the elements. The frame of a house is made of stakes planted in the ground, with rafters and beams resting in crotches conveniently left by the wood-cutter. This slender frame is covered with cadjans, arranged systematically, and sewn together with cocoanut-leaf strands or tender rattans. Not a nail is used, and cadjan flaps that may be raised or lowered from within the building take the place of glazed windows. A dwelling of this character, carpeted with palm-mats, and flanked with verandas, brings a flowing measure of comfort to the dweller in the tropics; but the gales of the annual southwest monsoon play havoc with cadjan roofs and walls.

It being known that a fishery will

bring together at least forty thousand souls, a small army of coolies hastens to Marichchikkaddi a few weeks prior to the announced date for opening the fishery, to prepare the buildings necessary to house all and sundry, and to erect bungalows for the British functionaries having the enterprise in charge. Public buildings almost pretentious in size and design rise from the earth in a few days, including a residence for the Governor of Ceylon, who is expected to grace the fishery by a visit; one for the Government agent of the province in which the interesting industry is carried on; and another for the delegate of the Colonial Office. There rise, mushroom-like, as well, a court-house, treasury, hospital, prison, telegraph-office and post-office, and a fair example of that blessing of the East known as a rest-house, each reflecting surprising good taste, and being adequate to its purpose, and presumably completed at a cost well within the appropriation. Jerry-builders and grafters have yet to be discovered in Ceylon.

Marichchikkaddi parades structures dedicated neither to religion nor dissipation. But the bazaar-like alleys branching from the thoroughfares of the Cadjan City purvey many things not obtrusively obvious to the British official. Whatever his faith, the disciple of the pearl may solitarily prostrate himself beneath a convenient palm-tree, with face turned toward Mecca, or on the sea-front indulge the devotions stamping him a Hindu of merit.

In an administrative sense the important building is the "Kachcherie"—mayor's office and superintendent's headquarters in one; but the structure of material interest is the "kottu," wherein every sackful of oysters taken from the boats is counted and apportioned between the government and the divers. It is a parallelogram enclosure of two or three acres in area, fenced with bamboo palings, and roofed here and there to protect the coolies from the sun. For convenience, one end is as near the sea as prudence will admit; and the other, the official end, where accountants and armed guards are in command, is not far from the governmental offices. A system perfected by years of experience makes thieving within the kottu virtually im-

possible, and the clerks who record the count of oysters, and issue them upon official order, might safely conduct a bankers' clearing-house. On occasions they handle without error more than three million oysters in a day.

A quarter of a mile from the official section of the city is the great human warren and business region, where black men and brown—Hindus, Mohammedans, Buddhists, and others—dwell and traffic in peaceful communion. A broad thoroughfare, starting from the edge of the plateau overlooking the sea and extending inland until the settlement yields to the open country, is the "Main street;" and here, for ten or twelve weeks, is one of Asia's busiest marts. This part of Marichchikkaddi is planned with careful regard for sanitary needs and hygiene. Streets cross at right angles, and at every corner stands a lamp-post rudely made from jungle wood, from which suspends a lantern ingeniously fashioned from an American petroleum tin. Sites on the principal streets are leased for the period of the fishery to persons proving their purposes to be legitimate. For a good corner lot, perhaps twenty feet square, the government receives as much as a thousand rupees; and a few hours after the lease is signed up goes a cadjan structure—and a day later pearls worth a king's ransom may there be dealt in with an absence of concern astounding to a visitor.

Can these Easterners, squatting on mats like fakirs in open-front stalls, judge the merits of a pearl? Yes, decidedly. In the twinkling of an eye one of them estimates the worth of a gem with a precision that would take a Bond Street dealer hours to determine. The Indian or Cingalese capitalist who goes with his cash to Marichchikkaddi to buy pearls is not given to taking chances; usually he has learned by long experience every "point" that a pearl can possess, knows whether it be precisely spherical, and has a good "skin," and a luster appealing to connoisseurs. A metal colander or simple scale enables him to know to the fraction of a grain the weight of a pearl, and experience and the trader's instinct tell him everything further that may possibly be known of a gem. It would be as profitless to assume to instruct an Egyptian

desert sheikh upon the merits of a horse as to try to contribute information to the pearl-dealer of the East.

The calm period of the northeast monsoon is gentleness itself by the middle of February, and the Gulf of Manar is seldom more than rippled by its zephyrs. It is then the fishery begins. For weeks the divers have been arriving by craft of every conceivable type and rig. They are the aristocrats of the camp, and as they roam bazaars and streets or promenade the sea-front they are admired by coolies and peons as bull-fighters would be in Spain.

Sturdy fellows they are, lithe of limb and broad of chest. Each brings a tangle of pots and kettles, bags and bales, but wears nothing throughout the fishery save a loin-cloth and now and then a turban denoting nationality or caste. Last year there were forty-five hundred of them, and those from the Madras Presidency were the backbone of the enterprise. Nearly half the divers were registered from Kilakari, and hundreds came from the tip end of India.

The only Ceylon city contributing divers was Jaffna, whose men were of the fisher caste, said to be descendants of Arabs who settled sixty years ago at Jaffna. The divers coming the greatest distance were the negroes and Arabs from Aden and the Persian Gulf, most of whom landed at Colombo from trading steamers, and made their way by small boat or bullock hackery to the Cadjan City.

These fellows have few equals as divers, but the administrative officers of the camp always fear that they will come into conflict with the police or launch a war in the name of Mohammed against the Hindus or Cingalese. Consequently, only a limited number are allowed to take part in the fishery.

An amusing incident was furnished last season by the arrival of a diver of some renown in India, who had participated profitably in several fisheries. With his "manduck," (assistant) the fellow had crossed from Paumben as a deck passenger on a British India steamer. When the vessel was anchored, the diver summoned a rowboat to take himself and his belongings ashore. Wearing nothing but loin-cloth and turban, the man descended

the side-steps an example of physical perfection, and so thoroughly smeared with cocoanut butter that he shone like a stove-polish advertisement. The boat grounding on the shelving bottom a hundred feet from shore, this precious Indian, who was to pass a good share of the ensuing ten weeks in the water, even at the bottom of the sea, deliberately seated himself astride the shoulders of his manduck, and was borne to dry land with the care of one whose religion might forbid contact with water. Throughout the trip from the small boat he carried beneath one arm a gingham umbrella, and under the other an Indian railway-guide.

There are neither wharves nor landing-stages at Marichchikkaddi. Even His Excellency the Governor must lay aside his dignity in going from his boat to the shore. The horde of people working about the pearling fleet, amphibious by nature, have little need for those accommodations and necessities which the commercial world calls "landing facilities."

The world over, gambling and speculation are joined in many ways to superstition; and the Eastern diver is superstitious to the hour of his death. At Marichchikkaddi he devotedly resorts to the mystic ceremony of the shark-charmer, whose exorcism for generations has been an indispensable preliminary to the opening of a fishery. The shark-charmer's power is believed to be hereditary. If one of them can be enlisted on a diver's boat, success is assured to all connected with the craft. The common form of fortune-tempting nowadays is for a diver to break a cocoanut on his sinking-weight just before embarking. If it be a clean and perfect break, success is assured; if irregular and jagged, only ordinary luck may be anticipated; and if the shell be broken in without separating into halves, it spells disaster, and the alarmed fisher probably refuses to go with the boat.

Last year's fleet was the largest ever participating in a Ceylon fishery, three hundred and twenty boats being enrolled. The largest boats came from Tuticorin, and carried thirty-four divers each. The smallest boat had a complement of seven divers. Each diver was faithfully at-

tended by a manduck, who ran his tackle and watched over his interests with jealous care both in and out of the water.

Besides the manducks, every boat had numerous sailors, food- and water-servers, and a riffraff of hangers-on. It was estimated that divers and manducks aggregated nine thousand souls. A system of apportionment gives every man in a boat an interest in the take, the divers generally retaining two thirds of the bivalves left over by the government rules controlling the fishery. The Kilakari divers observe a time-honored custom of giving to their home mosque the proceeds of one plunge each day.

Nature obligingly assists the workers on the banks by supplying a gentle off-shore breeze at daybreak, which sends the fleet to the fishing ground, six or eight miles from the shore. By two o'clock in the afternoon a gun from a government vessel directs the boats to set sail for the return. By this hour the breeze is accommodately from the sea, and the fleet runs home with flowing sheets. Navigation, it will be seen, plays a very subordinate part in Marichchik-kaddi's marine enterprise.

With the exception of the divers from the Malabar coast, who plunge head foremost from a spring-board, the men go into the water in an upright position, and are hurried in their journey to the bottom by a stone weighing from forty to fifty pounds. Each diver's attendant has charge of two ropes slung over a railing above the side of the boat: one suspends the diving-stone, and the other a wide-mouthed basket of network. The nude diver, already in the sea, places the basket on the stone and inserts one foot in a loop attached to the stone. He draws a long breath, closes his nostrils with the fingers of one hand, raises his body as high as possible above water, to give force to his descent, and, loosening the rope supporting the weight, is carried quickly to the bottom. An Arab diver closes the nostrils with a tortoise-shell clip, and occasionally a diver is seen whose ears are stopped with oil-saturated cotton. The manduck hoists the weight from the bottom and adjusts it for the next descent. Meanwhile, the diver, working face downward, is rapidly filling

the basket with oysters. When the basket is filled or his breath exhausted, the diver signals, and is drawn up as speedily as possible by the rope attached to the basket, and a specially agile diver facilitates the ascent by climbing hand over hand on the line. When a man has been in the water half an hour, and has made perhaps seven or eight descents, he is glad to get a rest and a sun-bath, but in a few minutes he is taking part in the interminable chatter of the Orient.

A diver coming up with basket filled wears a face of benign contentment; but when the oysters are few and far between, as they often are, and the man has prolonged his stay below to the limit of his air supply, his head is out of water not many seconds before he is volubly denouncing the official control forcing him to work on a "paar" where little but sand exists, and his confreres on the boat hurl savage invective at any government functionary within earshot.

The powerful Eastern sun illumines the bottom sufficiently for a diver to plan his operations before going down; and nine days out of ten the overhead sun renders the sea sufficiently transparent to guide a boat's crew to promising anchorages. Pearling economists insist that dredging by machinery or the use of diving-suits can never compete with the simple and inexpensive method in vogue on the Manar banks. At Marichchik-kaddi one hears frequent discussion of the time a diver may stay under water, and many improbable accounts of what has been done are told to visitors. An average Tamil or Moorman stays down not longer than forty-five seconds, while the broad-chested Arab thinks nothing of being under water from sixty to eighty seconds.

Depth has much to do with the time, and it is admitted that divers do not suffer unduly from the trying nature of their calling except when forced to work in unusually deep water. Seven or eight fathoms—about the average on the Ceylon banks—produces no injurious effect, but nine fathoms tell on all but men of sturdy build. Occasionally a declivity perhaps ten fathoms below the surface has to be fished, and this demands the service of picked men, divers possessing the highest vitality. Every season several

divers collapse through toiling at unusual depths, and two or three pay the penalty of death. Most divers, however, live to as full a span as men pursuing other humble callings.

When a fishery is at its height, the scene on the banks is one of extreme animation, and a picture full of strangeness to New World eyes. Each craft is a floating hive of competitive noise and activity, and the center of a cordon of disappearing and reappearing seal-like heads, with baskets splashing in the water or being hauled by excited hands. In the distance floats the majestic barque *Rengasamy Puravey*, an old-timer, with stately spars, a quarter-deck, and painted portholes that might cause a landsman to believe her a war-ship. For half the year the barque is the home of the government's marine biologist, and his office and laboratory, wherein scientific investigation and experimentation are in constant progress, are in houses built on the quarter-deck. Small steamers, having an official cut, move here and there among the fishing boats, doing patrol duty and carrying instructions when necessary from the *Rengasamy Puravey*.

"Would you like to go down in a diving-costume from a boat alongside the barque?" asked the biologist; "it's perfectly safe, and I have a dress that will fit you. Frequently I go to the bottom to study the curious growths there, and last season the Colonial Secretary went down two or three times." But I promptly declined the courtesy, explaining that I was content to accept a vicarious description of things at the bottom of the sea.

The instant the "cease-work" gun is fired the dingy fleet blossoms into a cloud of canvas, with every boat headed for Marichchikkaddi. The scene suggests a regatta on a gigantic scale, and from a distance the leaning lug and lateen sails of the East give the idea of craft traveling at terrific speed. It is a regatta, a free-for-all, devil-take-the-hindmost affair. The prizes are choice berths on the beach as near as possible to the kottu, and the coolies who must carry the sacks of oysters see to it that the "tindal" and his sailors make no retarding error.

The camp has been peaceful and somnolent while the boats have been out;

but the word that the fleet is coming in rouses every laborer, every petty dealer, speculator, and harpy to nervous activity. Everybody goes to the sea-front to witness the beaching of the boats and to watch the unloading. An hour probably elapses between the coming of the leader of the fleet and the arrival of the slowest boat. During this period the important functionary is the beach-master, who shouts his commands to boats seeking to crowd into positions not rightly theirs. When a boat is securely drawn upon the strand, there is no waste of time in getting the cargo started for the government storehouse. Muscular porters glistening in their perspiring nakedness, go in single file between boat and kottu like ants executing a transportation feat. In a very few minutes the oysters are being counted by nimble-handed coolies. Important gamblers in oysters, men with sharp eyes and speculative instincts, have only to note the number of sacks delivered from one or two boats—and secure a hint from an obliging diver as to whether the bivalves are "thin" or "thick"—to arrive at a safe hypothesis of what the day's take has been, and also whether the oysters promise to be fairly pearliferous. The opinions of two or three of these experts make a basis for starting the prices at the auction in the evening, and these "sharps" are seldom wrong in their estimate of what would be a safe offer for a thousand chances in the great lottery of Asia.

The count in the kottu is soon completed, and each boat's catch is divided into three piles, when an official selects two for the government, and the third is so expeditiously removed that a quarter of an hour later the share of the divers is being huckstered throughout the camp to small speculators.

Upon each craft throughout the day has been a native watchman of supposed honesty, in the government's employ, whose duty has been to see that no oysters were surreptitiously opened on the banks or during the run home. If any member of the crew is suspected the police are informed, and an arrest follows. A favorite way of hiding pearls is to tie the gems in a rag attached to the anchor that is thrown overboard when the boat lands. Another is to fasten a packet to a piece of rigging adroitly run to the masthead,

there to remain until opportunity admits of its unobserved removal.

On their way to their sleeping quarters it is interesting to observe divers stopping at boutiques and tea-saloons for refreshments, paying their score with oysters, extremely acceptable to the shopkeeper itching to test his luck. In a small way, oysters pass current in the Cadjan City as the equivalent of coins. Probably the variations in value lead to fluctuations in exchange, but these are so keenly understood that the quotations are apparently adjusted automatically, like exchange between nations.

The sale is held in the building where the camp magistrate all the afternoon has been dispensing justice in breaches of Marichchikkaddi's morals—simple assaults, thieving, and other petty misdemeanors usual to police courts. Punctually at sunset the auction begins. If the universe offers a stranger gathering for which commerce is responsible, it would be difficult to give it location. The gentle Government agent sits on the platform, and in front of the rostrum is the splendidly appareled chief mudiliyar, to interpret between auctioneer and buyers. The bidders-to-be number half a hundred, and their eager faces are directed toward the august official of the government, each probably praying secretly to his god that undue competition be not inspired to the extent of excluding bargains. In the throng are chetties, Moor merchants, and local hawkers, hoping to get a few thousand bivalves at a price assuring a profit when peddled through the coastwise villages.

"Do these men represent actual capital?" I asked the agent. "They do, indeed," is the reply; "and collectively they are backed by cash in hand and satisfactory credits in Ceylon banks of at least a hundred lakhs of rupees." Forced as you are to accept the statement, you inwardly confess that they don't look it, for \$3,200,000 is a goodly credit anywhere.

In the fading light of day the agent announces that approximately two million oysters are to be sold, and he invites offers for them by the thousand—the highest bidder to take as many as he chooses, the quotation to be effective and apply to others until it is raised by some

one who fears there will not be oysters enough to satisfy the demands of everybody. It is the principle of supply and demand reduced to simplicity. The competition to fix the price of the first lot consumes perhaps a minute. The initial bid is, perhaps, thirty rupees; this is elevated to thirty-two, and so on until thirty-six is the maximum that can be induced from the motley assemblage. With his pencil the agent taps the table, and the mudiliyar says something in Hindustani meaning "sold." The buyer is an Arab from Bombay, operating for a syndicate of rich Indians taking a flier in lottery tickets. In a manner almost lordly he announces that he will take four hundred thousand oysters. Then a sale of two thousand follows at an advanced price to a nondescript said to have come all the way from Mecca; a towering Sikh from the Punjab secures twenty thousand at a reduced rate, and so on. In ten or twelve minutes the day's product is disposed of to greedy buyers for the sum of 62,134 good and lawful rupees. A clerk records names of buyers with expedition, glancing now and then at a document proving their credit, and in a few minutes issues the requisitions upon the kottu for the actual oysters; and these drafts will be honored in the early morning.

The primitive process by which the pearls are extracted from the oysters is tedious, offensive to the senses, and of a character much too disagreeable to be associated with the jewel symbolizing purity. A few million oysters are shipped to southern India, and some go to Jaffna and Colombo; but the preponderating bulk is dealt with in the private kottus in the outskirts of the camp belonging to the men who crowd the auction-room. To open fresh from the sea and scrutinize every part of the oyster would be too slow a method to be applied to the business of pearl-getting. The native who obtains a few dozen seeks shelter under the first mustard-tree and, with dull-edged knife, dissects each bivalve with a thoroughness permitting nothing to escape his eye.

The burning sun, bringing decay and putrefaction to the oyster, is the operator's agency for securing what pearls his purchase may contain. For a week or ten days the oysters are stacked in his

private kottu, and the process of disinfection is facilitated by swarms of flies and millions of maggots. When the tropical sun can do no more, the contents of the shells—putrid, filthy, and overpoweringly odoriferous—are gathered in troughs and other receptacles to be put through a process of cleansing by washing with water frequently drawn away. The residue, carefully preserved, is picked over when dry by experts, working under the watchfulness of the owner or his deputy—and in this manner are wrested from nature the pearls of my lady's dainty necklace or engagement ring.

Sometimes an impatient speculator is seen with his coolies on the beach carefully washing vatfuls of "matter," perhaps employing a dugout canoe as a washing trough. Wherever the work is done the stench is almost overpowering, and the odors defy neutralization. The wonder is that some dread disease of the Orient does not make a clean sweep of the city's population. The medical officers claim that the malodorous fumes are not dangerous, and experience has taught these officials to locate the compounds, wherein millions of oysters are to decompose, in a position where the trade winds waft the smells seaward or inland, without greatly affecting the health of the camp. The British official whose olfactory organ survives a season at the pearl camp deserves from his home government at least the honor of knighthood.

Interesting as Marichchikkaddi is to the person making a study of the conduct of unusual industries and the government of Eastern people, the medical officer looms important as the functionary shouldering a greater responsibility than any other officer of the camp. To draw forty thousand people from tropical lands, grouping them on a sand plain only a few hundred miles above the equator, is an undertaking pregnant with danger, when considered from the standpoint of hygiene. Strange to say, Marichchikkaddi's health is always satisfactory; but tons of disinfectants have to be used. Malarial fever is ever present, but it is of a mild type. The outdoor dispensary does a rushing business, but only seventy-five cases were sufficiently serious last season

to be sent to hospital, and only ten of these were fatal. The divers are prone to pneumonia and pleurisy, and these diseases carried off five. The deaths out of hospital totaled twenty-two.

As an illustration of the white man's supremacy in dealing with black and brown peoples, Marichchikkaddi probably has no equal. Here, in an isolated spot on the coast of Ceylon, hours from anywhere by sea, and shut off from the large towns of the island by jungle and forest wherein roam elephants, leopards, and other wild animals, twelve or fifteen Britishers rule, with an authority never challenged, more than forty thousand adventurous Asiatics—men whose vocation is largely based on their daring, and whose competing religions and castes possess the germ of fanaticism that might be roused to bloodshed. The white man's control is supported by the presence of two hundred policemen, it is true, but these are natives. The keynote of this exposition of a multitude ruled by a handful of Europeans is the absolute fairness of their control. Otherwise it would be inviting disaster for the white official to apprehend a wrongdoer, place him on trial, and personally administer with lash or birch the corporal punishment to be witnessed any morning in front of the camp lockup.

And what might happen if the divers, through their ringleaders, should object to surrendering to the government the demanded "rake-off" of two thirds the oysters rescued from the sea by their efforts, in the event of these courageous fellows being assured that all the law in the world on the subject says that all the sea and all therein contained, beyond the distance of three nautical miles from shore, belongs to the universe? But, presumably, the Manar diver knows naught of the three-mile law.

Does the fishery pay? So far as facts are obtainable, one must answer,—tremendously. The government treasury is sometimes enormously expanded. Last year, the most prosperous of all Manar fisheries, the government sold its fifty million oysters for two and one-half million rupees, and at least \$600,000 of this was profit. Years ago, it is true, there were several fisheries that produced for the treasury nothing but deficits. Nobody

ever knows what reward visits the purchasers of oysters, for it is their habit to spread the report of disappointment or failure. But the buyers and speculators come each year in larger numbers, with augmented credits, and they pay in competition with their kind a larger price for the oysters. The conclusion is, therefore, that they find the business profitable.

Did I try my luck? Of course I did. Who could resist the temptation? I purchased two great sackfuls of oysters, a thousand in number, which were brought off to the Government tug *Active* by salaaming peons from the Government agent's office.

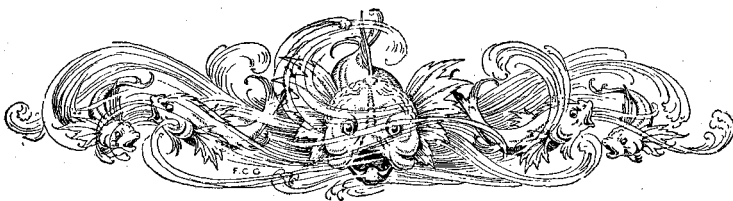
Yes, as we steamed away from Marichchikkaddi that evening, I was confident that the bags on the stern grating that had been freshly soused with seawater contained a wealth of pearls. In the early morning I would subsidize the eight native sailors, getting them to open the shelled treasures, while I garnered the pearls. With this thought uppermost, I turned in on a cushionless bench to snatch a few hours' sleep. But slumber was out of the question; my brain was planning what might be done with the pearls I was soon to possess. Yes, there surely would be plenty for a pearl-studded tiara for the loved one awaiting me; and any superfluity might be made into ropes and collars for admiring relatives at home.

Cousin Jessie had always coveted a necklace of pearls with a diamond clasp. The dainty baubles were in those sacks; there was no question about that. Yes, my luck at pearl-getting would compensate for missing Sir Thomas Lipton's dinner in Colombo. And when sleep came at last I fell to dreaming of my cargo of priceless gems.

Suddenly I was awakened by excruciating pains. In an instant I was rolling on the deck and shrieking. Could it be cholera, the plague, or simply appendicitis with which I was stricken? The sailors held me down, but not a soul on board knew a word of English. I was positive that my end had come, and the thought of expiring away from friends and with a pocketful of prepaid around-the-world tickets was not agreeable. The pain continued for ten long hours with varying severity. Morning came, and the Indian skipper was plying his furnace with lubricating oil and turpentine—with anything that would help him get me to Colombo and medical skill. At last, eighteen hours out from Marichchikkaddi, the *Active* was in the harbor and I was being carried to the Grand Oriental Hotel.

"What about the two bags of oysters, the captain wishes to know?" asked the hotel interpreter.

"Oh, give them to the men," I answered; "what I want is a doctor."



RUNNING WATER

BY A. E. W. MASON

Author of "The Four Feathers," "Miranda of the Balcony," etc.

XII

THE HOUSE OF THE RUNNING WATER



WEEK later, on a sunlit afternoon, Sylvia and her father drove northward out of Weymouth, between the marshes and the bay. Sylvia was silent, and looked about

her with expectant eyes.

"I have been lucky, Sylvia," her father had previously said to her. "I have secured for our summer holiday the very house in which you were born. It cost me some trouble; but I was determined to get it if I could, for I had an idea that you would be pleased. However, you are not to see it until it is quite ready."

There was a prettiness and a delicacy in this thought which greatly appealed to Sylvia. He had spoken it with a smile of tenderness. Affection, surely, could alone have prompted it, and she thanked him very gratefully. They were now upon their way to take possession.

A little white house set back under a hill, and looking out across the bay from a thick cluster of trees, caught Sylvia's eye. Was that the house? she wondered. The carriage turned inland and passed the white house, and half a mile farther on turned again eastward along the road to Wareham, following the valley, which runs parallel to the sea. They ascended the long, steep hill which climbs to Osmington, until, upon their left hand, a narrow road branched off between hawthorn hedges to the downs. The road dipped to a little hollow, and in the hollow a village was set. A row of deep-thatched white cottages, with

leaded window-panes, opened upon a causeway of flagstones, which was bordered with purple phlox and raised above the level of the road. Farther on, the roof of a mill rose high among trees, and an open space showed Sylvia the black, massive wheel against the yellow wall. Then the carriage stopped at a house on the left-hand side, and Garratt Skinner got out.

"Here we are," he said.

It was a small square house of the Georgian days, built of old brick, dusky red. One entered it at the side, and the big, level windows of the living-rooms looked out upon a wide and high walled garden, where a little door under a brick archway in the wall gave a second entrance upon the road. Into this garden Sylvia wandered. If she had met with few people who matched the delicate company of her dreams, here, at all events, was a mansion where that company might fitly have gathered. Great elms and beeches bent under their load of leaves to the lawn; about the lawn flowers made a wealth of color; and away to the right of the house, twisted stems and branches, where the green of the apples was turning to red, stood evenly spaced in a great orchard. And the mill-stream, tunnelling under the road and the wall, ran swiftly between banks in the garden and the orchard, singing as it ran. There lingered, she thought, an ancient grace about this old garden, some flavor of forgotten days, as in a room scented with potpourri; and she walked the lawn in a great contentment.

The house within charmed her no less. It was a place of many corners and quaint nooks, and of a flooring so unlevel that she could hardly pass from one room