

Holland, the Gulf of Mexico, and the coasts of Japan. It attains perfection nowhere but in the equatorial seas; but the pearl fishery in the island of Ceylon is the most celebrated and productive: it is on the west coast, off the bay of Condatchy, where the country is very sandy, and nearly without inhabitants; but on these occasions a populous town, with many streets a mile long, appears to have suddenly started up. The oyster beds or banks extend over a space thirty miles long by twenty-four broad. The 20th of February is generally the day of rendezvous for the fishermen. The fishery is commonly rented by a single individual, who is allowed to employ 150 boats for thirty days; there are about 6000 boatmen and attendants. The oysters vary in their qualities, according to the nature of the ground to which they are attached; and also in their number, by the action of the tides and other circumstances: those at the greatest depth produce the largest pearls, which are situate in the fleshy part near the hinge. Pearls consist of concentric coats of the same substance as that which forms the mother-of-pearl of the shell; they are produced by the extravasation of a lapidifying fluid, secreted in the organs of the animal, and filtered by its glands. For one pearl that is found perfectly round and detached between the membranes of the mantle, hundreds of irregular ones occur attached to the mother-of-pearl like so many warts: they are sometimes so numerous that the animal cannot shut its shell, and so perishes. The pearl is a formation forced upon the animal by some annoying substance in its shell, which it covers with mother-of-pearl, as the bees do intrusive wasps with wax, to fix it or hinder it from affecting them by putridity, &c. Sir E. Home is of opinion that the abortive eggs of the animal are the nucleus upon which the pearl is formed, and he has made it very probable that this is often or generally the case; but still the process