

of the mild summer night biting and splashing in the tepid water, and it was not till Tinorus began to walk in his sleep, and we ourselves were so tired that we just cut holes in the water, that we at last regretfully turned homeward.

In addition to these methods of capture there are of course many others, but they are all considerably less interesting than those I have described. Hooks, for example, are by no means unknown, but in contrast to what we are accustomed to, the Rarotians use neither rod, float or worm. They hold the line in their hands, and for bait they always use little fish or cuttle-fish meat. (There are, in fact, no worms on the island.) In most cases they fish from the reef or let the line trail behind a canoe more or less as when we use a trolling-rod, but it sometimes still happens that they simply swim about with the line in their hand in the ancient Polynesian manner. The boldest go far out to sea without an accompanying boat, or swim about in the lagoon for hours.

But the best place for all kinds of fishing with hook and line is the entrance to the lagoon. All the year round huge shoals containing fish in thousands pass through the entrance every day, either on their way out of the lagoon or on their way in. The commonest kinds are the *oivi* (a blue-green fish which can be nearly two feet long), *paikera* (a flattened, bluish fish), and *raf* (a fish with delicate rich flesh). The Rarotians catch huge quantities of these from their canoes, which they anchor in the middle of the entrance or let drift with the stream.

Man cannot live by bread alone, and the Rarotians live not only on fish, but also consume great quantities of other sea food. Snails and mussels, which used to figure prominently on the menu, are now seldom eaten, but eels and rock lobsters (a kind of lobster which has no claws) are still esteemed delicacies. Eels are always harpooned in the same way as other fish, and this method of capture is sometimes used for rock lobsters. As a rule, however, the Rarotians are unwilling to use the harpoon for them, as it kills them, and they prefer to catch them in another and more cunning way. They make the children frighten them out of their hiding-places, and simply put a foot on them when they come running along.

Then there are turtles. In old times the turtle was a sacred animal, and every good catch was celebrated with religious ceremonies at the *marae*, or tribal place of sacrifice. It naturally lost its special place as a sacred animal long ago, but its flesh still tastes just as good (something like roast veal) and it is therefore still hunted as keenly. There are many different kinds of turtle, the smaller of which are about the size of a motor-car wheel and the larger about as big as a bicycle wheel. Some live in the lagoons, others only in the sea.

To make clear how these turtles, which often weigh over 500 pounds, are hunted, I will try to describe one of the expeditions in which I myself took part. It was at the beginning of June, and one of the first times in the year that any turtles had been sighted. During June and the following months, as a rule they collect on the lee side of the Tumanou atolls for breeding, and during this period a boy, or a couple of boys, always sit at the look-out point on the beach or in the palm-tops so as to be able to let the men know in time. But this time it was two girls who ran up quite breathless and declared that they had seen half a dozen black spots in the sea west of the village. All the men hastened to push their canoes into the sea, and I jumped into my friend Tehei's, as had been agreed, as soon as we had succeeded in making our way through the surf. As the sailing canoes are too large and clumsy for turtle-hunting the Rarotians use their small open canoes which hold at most three men, and are certainly nothing to make a song about, although they are often compelled to go far out to sea in rough weather. While Tehei and Tara wickered the paddles till they creaked, I had to devote myself to the third man's usual occupation—to bale out the canoe as well as I could with the coconut-shell scoop.

In the bottom of the canoe lay a long supple rope, to one end of which a large iron hook was fastened. This was the entire equipment. But Tehei was soon to have an opportunity of showing what this simple implement could do in skilful hands, for we came upon a turtle after only a quarter of an hour's paddling. In most cases one has to stalk a turtle with care and slowly manoeuvre oneself within range, but this

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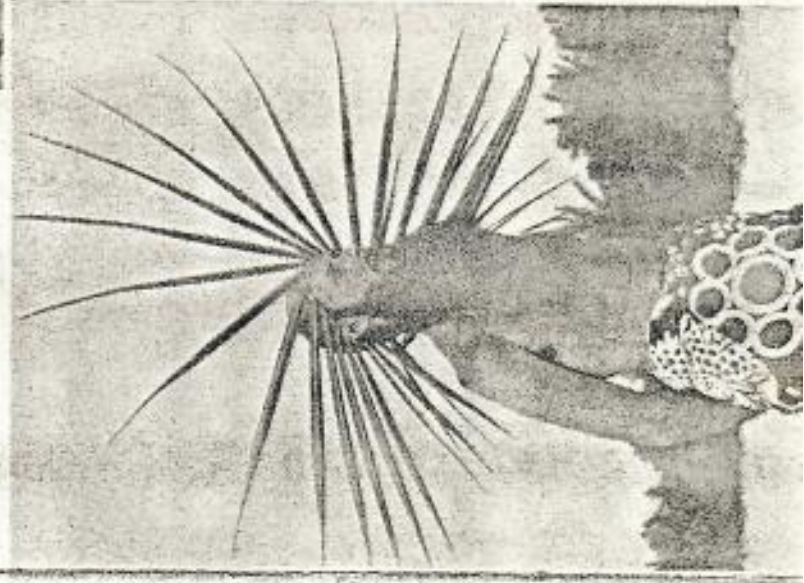
turtle rose suddenly from the depths right under our bows and presented us with a chance. It naturally disappeared again as soon as it caught sight of the canoe, but Tehei was as quick as the turtle and dived in with the iron hook in one hand and the rope trailing behind him. For a time we could see two dark shadows vanishing into the depths at furious speed; but then they were clean gone, and the only thing we could do was to sit looking at the rope which ran slowly out over the side. Fifteen feet, thirty feet, forty-five feet, sixty feet. . . .

After a minute which seemed an eternity there was a sudden jerk on the rope. This was the signal that Tehei had got the turtle, and we caught hold of the rope and hauled it in as quickly as we could. Tehei put his head above the surface for a moment to breathe; then he dived again. Slowly but surely we hauled our quarry in, and soon we had the satisfaction of seeing a turtle as large as a cartwheel lying kicking beside the canoe.

To judge from this description, it certainly looks as if there was nothing very remarkable about catching a turtle, but this is entirely because the course of events is seen from above. For the diver who himself pursues his quarry under water it is by no means as simple and safe. In the first place it is trying to the lungs and heart to dive swiftly to a great depth, and it has happened more than once that the helpers in the canoe have had to haul in an unconscious comrade instead of a turtle. There are, too, always plenty of sharks, which on such occasions can easily confuse a turtle with a diver. (Certain sharks are actually capable of biting them both in half.) Lastly, the hook must be placed in the turtle's throat, the only part which is really vulnerable, and at the same time the diver must take good care to keep out of the way of the turtle's jaws. A turtle which has once closed its jaws on a man's hand does not let go till its head—or the man's hand—is cut off.

Even if the diver succeeds in placing the hook in the turtle's throat, this does not mean that all difficulties are over. The turtle has to be got up to the surface, and for this it is not enough just to haul on the rope. Most turtles are strong

Marie-Thérèse soon learnt to plait palm-leaves like the island women



The author with a crown of palm-leaves as formerly worn at turtle feasts

enough to tear the rope out of the haulers' hands or disappear seaward with the whole outfit, if the diver is not skilful. Only when he has got a good grip of the turtle's shell, and, by turning it on its back and keeping it firmly in this position, prevents it from swimming in the opposite direction, can the creature be hauled up. This, however, means a wrestling bout requiring both courage and strength, and it is a fact that the turtle wins just as often as the diver.

Another, but more difficult method of getting the turtle to the surface is to sit astride it, seize hold of its head and press one's fingers into its eyes. By forcing the turtle's head upwards one can compel it to rise to the surface itself—if one has the strength in one's hands to hold on long enough, of course. Many declare that the most skilful turtle-hunters in the Tuamotu group, when once they have got their prey up to the surface, can even steer it in to the beach and the earth oven that awaits it. But that is a thing I should like to see before I believe it!

An account of fish life on Raroua would, of course, not be complete without rather more-detailed mention of sharks. Both the lagoon and the sea teem with sharks, and I have not yet been on a single fishing expedition without having seen one or more of these brutes. Most of them are small, from three to six feet long, and make off at once if one splashes in the water a bit, but now and then one comes upon big fellows who seem anything but timid. I soon noticed that the Rarouians' demeanour changed with a change of hunting-ground. While they dive and swim in the creek by the village without the least fear, they are as a rule not particularly inclined to jump in at other places in the lagoon or into the sea, and if they do they always take care to be armed with a sharp knife. I asked Rauri one day to what this difference was due.

"That's easily explained," he replied. "We bathe and fish so often in the creek by the village that the sharks have been scared away. They've learnt that it's dangerous to come in here, and they have got a wholesome respect for men. At other places in the lagoon and in the sea, where people seldom go, they are fool-hardy and go for everything that moves in the water. Strangers more than anyone ought to be careful.

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Sea-turtles are caught during the mating season from June to September

Fishing in the old Polynesian style: a shoal is surrounded by a huge garland of palm-leaves

