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Curious myths of the middle ages

Sabine Baring-Gould

Library
of the
University of Wisconsin

CURIOUS MYTHS OF THE
MIDDLE AGES

RIVINGTONS

L ondon	..	..	..	..	..	..	<i>Waterloo Place</i>
O xford	..	..	..	..	..	..	<i>High Street</i>
C ambridge	..	..	..	..	..	..	<i>Trinity Street</i>

CURIOUS MYTHS OF
THE MIDDLE AGES

BY

advised
S. BARING-GOULD, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "POST-MEDIEVAL PREACHERS," ETC.

RIVINGTONS

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Melusina



From Pucé Church (Gironde).

EMMERICK, Count of Poitou, was a nobleman of great wealth, and eminent for his virtues. He had two children, a son named Bertram, and a daughter Blaniferte. In the great forest which stretched away in all directions around the knoll on which stood the town and castle of Poitiers, lived a Count de la Forêt, related to Emmerick, but poor and with a large family. Out of compassion for his kinsman, the Count of Poitou adopted his youngest son Raymond, a beautiful

and amiable youth, and made him his constant companion in hall and in the chase. One day the Count and his retinue hunted a boar in the forest of Colombiers, and distancing his servants, Emmerrick found himself alone in the depths of the wood with Raymond. The boar had escaped. Night came on, and the two huntsmen lost their way. They succeeded in lighting a fire, and were warming themselves over the blaze, when suddenly the boar plunged out of the forest upon the Count, and Raymond, snatching up his sword, struck at the beast, but the blade glanced off and slew the Count. A second blow laid the boar at his side. Raymond then with horror perceived that his friend and master was dead. In despair he mounted his horse and fled, not knowing whither he went.

Presently the boughs of the trees became less interlaced, and the trunks fewer; next moment his horse, crashing through the shrubs, brought him out on a pleasant glade, white with rime, and illumined by the new moon; in the midst bubbled up a limpid fountain, and flowed away over a pebbly floor with a soothing murmur. Near the fountain-head sat three maidens in glimmering white dresses, with long waving golden hair, and faces of inexpressible beauty.

Raymond was riveted to the spot with astonishment. He believed that he saw a vision of angels, and would have prostrated himself at their feet, had not one of them advanced and stayed him. The lady inquired the cause of his manifest terror, and the young man, after a slight hesitation, told her of his dreadful misfortune. She listened with attention, and at the conclusion of his story, recommended him to remount his horse, and gallop out of the forest, and return to Poitiers, as though unconscious of what had taken place. All the huntsmen had that day lost themselves in the wood, and were returning singly, at intervals, to the castle, so that no suspicion would attach to him. The body of the count would be found, and from the proximity of the dead boar, it would be concluded that he had fallen before the tusk of the animal, to which he had given its death-blow.

Relieved of his anxiety, Raymond was able to devote his attention exclusively to the beauty of the lady who addressed him, and found means to prolong the conversation till daybreak. He had never beheld charms equal to hers, and the susceptible heart of the youth was completely captivated by the fair unknown. Before he left her, he obtained from her a promise to be his. She then

told him to ask of his kinsman Bertram, as a gift, so much ground around the fountain where they had met, as could be covered by a stag's hide: upon this ground she undertook to erect a magnificent palace. Her name, she told him, was Melusina; she was a water-fay of great power and wealth. His she consented to be, but subject to one condition, that her Saturdays might be spent in a complete seclusion, upon which he should never venture to intrude.

Raymond then left her, and followed her advice to the letter. Bertram, who succeeded his father, readily granted the land he asked for, but was not a little vexed, when he found that, by cutting the hide into threads, Raymond had succeeded in making it include a considerable area.

Raymond then invited the young count to his wedding, and the marriage festivities took place, with unusual splendour, in the magnificent castle erected by Melusina. On the evening of the marriage, the bride, with tears in her beautiful eyes, implored her husband on no account to attempt an intrusion on her privacy upon Saturdays, for such an intrusion must infallibly separate them for ever. The enamoured Raymond readily swore to strictly observe her wishes in this matter.

Melusina continued to extend the castle, and strengthen its fortifications, till the like was not to be seen in all the country round. On its completion she named it after herself Lusinia, a name which has been corrupted into Lusignan, which it bears to this day.

In course of time, the Lady of Lusignan gave birth to a son, who was baptized Urian. He was a strangely shaped child : his mouth was large, his ears pendulous ; one of his eyes was red, the other green.

A twelvemonth later she gave birth to another son, whom she called Gedes ; he had a face which was scarlet. In thank-offering for his birth she erected and endowed the convent of Malliers ; and, as a place of residence for her child, built the strong castle of Favent.

Melusina then bore a third son, who was christened Gyot. He was a fine, handsome child, but one of his eyes was higher up in his face than the other. For him his mother built La Rochelle.

Her next son Anthony, had long claws on his fingers, and was covered with hair ; the next again had but a single eye. The sixth was Geoffry with the Tooth, so called from a boar's tusk which protruded from his jaw. Other children she had,

but all were in some way disfigured and monstrous.

Years passed, and the love of Raymond for his beautiful wife never languished. Every Saturday she left him, and spent the twenty-four hours in the strictest seclusion, without her husband thinking of intruding on her privacy. The children grew up to be great heroes and illustrious warriors. One, Freimund, entered the Church, and became a pious monk, in the abbey of Malliers. The aged Count de la Forêt and the brothers of Raymond shared in his good fortune, and the old man spent his last years in the castle with his son, whilst the brothers were furnished with money and servants suitable to their rank.

One Saturday, the old father inquired at dinner after his daughter-in-law. Raymond replied that she was not visible on Saturdays. Thereupon one of his brothers, drawing him aside, whispered that strange gossiping tales were about relative to this sabbath seclusion, and that it behoved him to inquire into it, and set the minds of people at rest. Full of wrath and anxiety, the count rushed off to the private apartments of the countess, but found them empty. One door alone was locked, and that opened into a bath. He looked through the key-

hole, and to his dismay beheld her in the water, her lower extremities changed into the tail of a monstrous fish or serpent.

Silently he withdrew. No word of what he had seen passed his lips ; it was not loathing that filled his heart, but anguish at the thought that by his fault he must lose the beautiful wife who had been the charm and glory of his life. Some time passed by, however, and Melusina gave no token of consciousness that she had been observed during the period of her transformation. But one day news reached the castle that Geoffry with the Tooth had attacked the monastery of Malliers, and burned it ; and that in the flames had perished Freimund, with the abbot and a hundred monks. On hearing of this disaster, the poor father, in a paroxysm of misery, exclaimed, as Melusina approached to comfort him, " Away, odious serpent, contaminator of my honourable race !"

At these words she fainted ; and Raymond, full of sorrow for having spoken thus intemperately, strove to revive her. When she came to herself again, with streaming tears she kissed and embraced him for the last time. " O husband !" she said, " I leave two little ones in their cradle ; look tenderly after them, bereaved of their mother. And now

farewell for ever! yet know that thou, and those who succeed thee, shall see me hover over this fair castle of Lusignan, whenever a new lord is to come." And with a long wail of agony she swept from the window, leaving the impression of her foot on the stone she last touched.

The children in arms she had left were Dietrich and Raymond. At night, the nurses beheld a glimmering figure appear near the cradle of the babes, most like the vanished countess, but from her waist downwards terminating in a scaly fish-tail enamelled blue and white. At her approach the little ones extended their arms and smiled, and she took them to her breast and suckled them; but as the grey dawn stole in at the casement, she vanished, and the children's cries told the nurses that their mother was gone.

Long was it believed in France that the unfortunate Melusina appeared in the air, wailing over the ramparts of Lusignan before the death of one of its lords; and that, on the extinction of the family, she was seen whenever a king of France was to depart this life. Mézeray informs us that he was assured of the truth of the appearance of Melusina on the old tower of Lusignan, previous to the death of one of her descendants, or of a king of France, by

people of reputation, and who were not by any means credulous. She appeared in a mourning dress, and continued for a long time to utter the most heart-rending lamentations.

Brantome, in his eulogium on the Duke of Montpensier, who in 1574 destroyed Lusignan, a Huguenot retreat, says :

“I heard, more than forty years ago, an old veteran say, that when the Emperor Charles V. came to France, they brought him by Lusignan for the sake of the recreation of hunting the deer, which were then in great abundance in the fine old parks of France; that he was never tired of admiring and praising the beauty, the size, and the chef d'œuvre of that house, built, which is more, by such a lady, of whom he made them tell him several fabulous tales, which are there quite common, even to the good old women who washed their linen at the fountains, whom Queen Catherine de Medicis, mother of the king, would also question and listen to. Some told her that they used sometimes to see her come to the fountain, to bathe in it, in the form of a most beautiful woman and in the dress of a widow. Others said that they used to see her, but very rarely, and that on Saturday evening (for in that state she did not let herself be

seen), bathing, half her body being that of a very beautiful lady, the other half ending in a snake ; others, that she used to appear a-top of the great tower in a very beautiful form, and as a snake. Some said, that when any great disaster was to come on the kingdom, or a change of reign, or a death, or misfortune among her relatives, who were the greatest people of France, and were kings, that three days before she was heard to cry, with a cry most shrill and terrible, three times.

“ This is held to be perfectly true. Several persons of that place, who have heard it, are positive of it, and hand it from father to son ; and say that, even when the siege came on, many soldiers and men of honour, who were there, affirmed it. But it was when order was given to throw down and destroy her castles, that she uttered her loudest cries and wails. Since then she has not been heard. Some old wives, however, say she has appeared to them, but very rarely ¹.”

In 1387, Jean d'Arras, secretary to the Duke of Berry, received orders from his master to collect all information attainable with reference to Melusina, probably for the entertainment of the sister of the

¹ Keightley's Fairy Mythology, 1860, pp. 483, 484.

duke, the Countess de Bar. This he did, making considerable use of a history of the mysterious lady, written "by one of the race of Lusinia, William de Portenach (qu. Partenope), in Italian." This history if it ever existed, has not come down to us; the work of Jean d'Arras is a complete romance. According to him, Helmas, king of Albania (Scotland, or, as the German popular versions have it, Nordland), married a fay named Pressina, whom he found singing beside a fountain. She became his, after having exacted from him an oath never to visit her during her lying-in. She gave birth to three little girls at once, Melusina, Melior, and Plantina. A son of Helmas by a former wife hurried to his father with the joyful news, and the king, oblivious of his promise, rushed to his wife and found her bathing her three children. Pressina, on seeing him, exclaimed against his forgetfulness, and, taking her babes in her arms, vanished. She brought up the daughters until they were fifteen, when she unfolded to them the story of their father's breach of promise, and Melusina, the youngest, determined on revenge. She, in concert with her sisters, caught King Helmas and chained him in the heart of a mountain called Avalon, or, in the German books, Brunbelois, in Northubelon, i.e. Northumberland. At this unfilial

act, the mother was so indignant, that she sentenced her daughter Melusina to spend the sabbath in a semi-fish form, till she should marry one who would never inquire into what became of her on that day. Jean d'Arras relates that Serville, who defended Lusignan for the English against the Duke de Berry, swore to that prince upon his faith and honour, "that three days before the surrender of the castle, there entered into his chamber, though the doors were shut, a large serpent, enamelled blue and white, which struck its tail several times against the foot of the bed whereon he was lying with his wife, who was not at all frightened at it, though he was very considerably so; and that when he seized his sword, the serpent changed all at once into a woman, and said to him: 'How, Serville, you, who have been in so many battles and sieges, are you afraid? Know that I am the mistress of this castle, which I erected, and that soon you will have to surrender it!' When she had ended these words, she resumed her serpent-shape, and glided away so swiftly that he could not perceive her."

Stephan, a Dominican, of the house of Lusignan, developed the work of Jean d'Arras, and made the story so famous, that the families of Luxembourg, Rohan, and Sassenaye altered their pedigrees so as

to be able to claim descent from the illustrious Melusina²; and the Emperor Henry VII. felt no little pride in being able to number the beautiful and mysterious lady among his ancestors. "It does not escape me," writes the chronicler Conrad Vecerius, in his life of that emperor, "to report what is related in a little work in the vernacular, concerning the acts of a woman, Melyssina, on one day of the week becoming a serpent from her middle downwards, whom they reckon among the ancestors of Henry VII. . . . But, as authors relate, that in a certain island of the ocean, there are nine Sirens endowed with various arts, such, for instance, as changing themselves into any shape they like, it is no absurd conjecture to suppose that Melyssina came thence³."

The story became immensely popular in France, in Germany, and in Spain, and was printed and reprinted. The following are some of the principal early editions of it.

Jean d'Arras, "Le liure de Melusine en frācoys;" Geneva, 1478. The same, Lyons and Paris, without date; Lyons, 4to, 1500, and again 1544;

² Bullet, Dissertat. sur la Mythologie Française. Paris, 1771, pp. 1—32.

³ Urstisius, *Scriptores Germaniæ*. Frankfort, 1670.

Troyes, 4to, no date. "L'histoire de Melusine fille du roy d'Albanie et de dame Pressine, revue et mise en meilleur langage que par cy devant ;" Lyons, 1597. "Le roman de Melusine, princesse de Lusignan, avec l'histoire de Geoffry, surnommé à la Grand Dent," par Nodot; Paris, 1700. An outline of the story in the "Bibliothèque des Romans," 1775, T. II. A Spanish version, "Historia de la linda Melosyna ;" Tolosa, 1489. "La hystoria de la linda Melosina ;" Sevilla, 1526. A Dutch translation, "Een san sonderlingke schone ende wonderlike historie, die men warachtich kout te syne ende autentick sprekende van eenre vrouwen gheheeten Melusine ;" Tantwerpen, 1500. A Bohemian version, probably translated from the German, "Kronyke Kratochwilne, o ctné a slech netné Panně Meluzijně ;" Prag, 1760, 1764, 1805. A Danish version, made about 1579, "Melusine ;" Copenhagen, 1667, 1702, 1729. One in Swedish, without date. The original of these three last was the "History of Melusina," by Thüring von Ringoltingen, published in 1456 ; Augsburg, 1474 ; Strasburg, 1478. "Melosine-Geschicht," illustrated with woodcuts ; Heidelberg, 1491. "Die Historia von Melusina ;" Strasburg, 1506. "Die Histori oder Geschicht von der edle und schönen Melusina ;" Augsburg,

1547; Strasburg, 1577, 1624. "Wunderbare Geschichte von der edeln und schönen Melusina, welche eine Tochter des Königs Helmus und ein Meerwunder gewesen ist;" Nürnberg, without date; reprinted in Marbach's "Volksbücher." Leipzig, 1838.

In the fable of Melusina, there are several points deserving of consideration, as—the framework of the story, the half-serpent or fish-shape of Melusina, and her appearances as warnings of impending misfortune or death. The minor details, as, for instance, the trick with the hide, which is taken from the story of Dido, shall not detain us.

The framework of the myth is the story-radical corresponding with that of Lohengrin. The skeleton of the romance is this—

1. A man falls in love with a woman of supernatural race.
2. She consents to live with him, subject to one condition.
3. He breaks the condition and loses her.
4. He seeks her, and—*a.* recovers her; *β.* never recovers her.

In the story before us, the last item has dropped out, but it exists in many other stories which have sprung from the same root. The beautiful legend of Undine is but another version of the same

story. A young knight marries a water-sprite, and promises never to be false to her, and never to bring her near a river. He breaks his engagement, and loses her. Then she comes to him on the eve of his second marriage and kisses him to death. Fouqué's inimitable romance is founded on the story as told by Theophrastus Paracelsus in his "Treatise on Elemental Sprites;" but the bare bones of the myth related by the philosopher have been quickened into life and beauty by the heaven-drawn spark of poetry wherewith Fouqué has endowed them.

In the French tale, Melusina seeks union with a mortal solely that she may escape from her enchantment; but in the German more earnest tale, Undine desires to become a bride that she may obtain an immortal soul. The corresponding Danish story is told by Hans Christian Andersen. A little mermaid sees a prince as she floats on the surface of the sea, and saves him in her arms from drowning when the ship is wrecked. But from that hour her heart is filled with yearning love for the youth whose life she has preserved. She seeks earth of her own free will, leaving her native element, although the consequence is pain at every step she takes.

She becomes the constant attendant of the prince, till he marries a princess, when her heart breaks and she becomes a Light-Elf, with prospect of immortality.

Belonging to the same family is the pretty Indian tale of *Urvaçî*. *Urvaçî* was an "apsaras," or heavenly maiden; she loved *Puravaras*, a martial king, and became his wife, only, however, on condition that she should never behold him without his clothes. For some years they were together, till the heavenly companions of *Urvaçî* determined to secure her return to her proper sphere. They accordingly beguiled *Puravaras* into leaving his bed in the darkness of night, and then, with a lightning-flash, they disclosed him in his nudity to the wife, who was thereupon constrained to leave him. A somewhat similar story is told, in the *Katha Sarit Sagara* (Book iii. c. 18), of *Vidûshaka*, who loves and marries a beautiful *Bhadra*, but after a while she vanishes, leaving behind her a ring. The inconsolable husband wanders in search of her, and reaching the heavenly land, drops the ring in a goblet of water, which is taken to her. By this she recognizes him, and they are re-united.

The legend of *Melusina*, as it comes to us, is by

no means in its original condition. Jean d'Arras, or other romancers, have considerably altered the simple tale, so as to make it assume the proportions of a romance. All that story of the fay Pressina, and her marriage with King Helmas, is but another version of the same story as Melusina.

Helmas finds Pressina near a fountain, and asks her to be his; she consents on condition that he does not visit her during her lying-in; he breaks the condition and loses her. This is the same as Raymond discovering Melusina near a spring, and obtaining her hand subject to the condition that he will not visit her one day of the week. Like Helmas, he breaks his promise and loses his wife. That both Pressina and Melusina are water-sprites, or nymphs, is unquestionable; both haunt a fountain, and the transformation of the lady of Lusignan indicates her aquatic origin. As Grimm has observed⁴, this is a Gallic, and therefore a Keltic myth, an opinion confirmed by the Banshee part played by the unfortunate nymph. For the Banshee superstition has no corresponding feature in Scandinavian, Teutonic, or Classic mythology, and belongs entirely to the Kelts. Among others

⁴ Deutsche Mythologie, i. 405.

there are death portents, but not, that I am aware of, spirits of women attached to families, by their bitter cries at night announcing the approach of the king of terrors.

The Irish Banshee is thus described: "We saw the figure of a tall, thin woman with uncovered head, and long hair that floated round her shoulders, attired in something which seemed either a loose white cloak or a sheet thrown hastily about her, uttering piercing cries.

"The most remarkable instance (of the Banshee) occurs in the MS. memoirs of Lady Fanshawe, so exemplary for her conjugal affection. Her husband, Sir Richard, and she chanced, during their abode in Ireland, to visit a friend, the head of a sept, who resided in an ancient baronial castle surrounded with a moat. At midnight she was awakened by a ghastly and supernatural scream, and looking out of bed, beheld in the moonlight a female face and part of the form hovering at the window. The face was that of a young and rather handsome woman, but pale, and the hair, which was reddish, loose and dishevelled. The dress, which Lady Fanshawe's terror did not prevent her remarking accurately, was that of the ancient Irish. This apparition continued to exhibit itself

for some time, and then vanished, with two shrieks similar to that which had first excited Lady Fanshawe's attention. In the morning, with infinite terror, she communicated to her host what she had witnessed, and found him prepared, not only to credit, but to account for the apparition:—

“‘A near relation of my family,’ said he, ‘expired last night in this castle. We disguised our certain expectations of the event from you, lest it should throw a cloud over the cheerful reception which was your due⁵. Now, before such an event happens in this family and castle, the female spectre whom ye have seen always is visible: she is believed to be the spirit of a woman of inferior rank, whom one of my ancestors degraded himself by marrying, and whom afterwards, to expiate the dishonour done to his family, he caused to be drowned in the castle moat.’”

A very remarkable story of the Banshee is given by Mr. Crofton Croker. The Rev. Charles Bunworth was rector of Buttevant, in the county Cork, about the middle of last century. He was famous for his performance on the national instrument, the

⁵ Like Admetus in the *Alcestis* of Euripides. This story of Lady Fanshawe is from a note to “The Lady of the Lake.”

Irish harp, and for his hospitable reception and entertainment of the poor harpers who travelled from house to house about the country; and in his granary were deposited fifteen harps, bequeathed to him by the last members of a race which has now ceased to exist.

The circumstances attending the death of Mr. Bunworth were remarkable; but, says Mr. Crofton Croker, there are still living credible witnesses who declare their authenticity, and who can be produced to attest most, if not all, of the following particulars. Shortly before his decease, a shepherd heard the Banshee keening and clapping her hands under a lightning-struck tree near the house. On the eve of his death the night was serene and moonlit, and nothing broke the stillness of the melancholy watch kept by the bedside of the sick man, who lay in the drawing-room, by his two daughters. The little party were suddenly roused by a sound at the window near the bed: a rose-tree grew outside the window, so closely as to touch the glass; this was forced aside with some noise, and a low moaning was heard, accompanied by clapping of hands, as if of some female in deep affliction. It seemed as if the sound proceeded from a person holding her mouth close to the window. The lady who

sat by the bedside of Mr. Bunworth went into the adjoining room, where sat some male relatives, and asked, in a tone of alarm, if they had heard the Banshee. Sceptical of supernatural appearances, two of them rose hastily, and went out to discover the cause of these sounds, which they also distinctly heard. They walked all round the house, examining every spot of ground, particularly near the window from whence the voice had proceeded; the bed of earth beneath, in which the rose-tree was planted, had been recently dug, and the print of a footstep—if the tree had been forced aside by mortal hand—would have inevitably remained; but they could perceive no such impression, and an unbroken stillness reigned without. Hoping to dispel the mystery, they continued their search anxiously along the road, from the straightness of which, and the lightness of the night, they were enabled to see some distance around them; but all was silent and deserted. and they returned surprised and disappointed. How much more then were they astonished at learning that, the whole time of their absence, those who remained within the house had heard the moaning and clapping of hands even louder and more distinct than before they had gone out; and

no sooner was the door of the room closed on them, than they again heard the same mournful sounds. Every succeeding hour the sick man became worse, and when the first glimpse of the morning appeared, Mr. Bunworth expired.

The Banshee is represented in Wales by the Gwrâch y Rhibyn, who is said to come after dusk, and flap her leathern wings against the window, giving warning of death, in a broken, howling tone, and calling on the one who is to quit mortality by his or her name several times. In Brittany, similar spirits are called Bandrhudes, and are attached to several of the ancient families. In other parts of France, they pass as Dames Blanches, who, however, are not to be confused with the Teutonic white ladies, which are spirits of a different order. *"Weisse Frau"*

But, putting the Banshee part of the story of Melusina on one side, let us turn to the semi-fish or serpent form of Melusina. Jean d'Arras attributes this to a curse pronounced on her by the fay Pressina, but this is an invention of his own; the true conception of Melusina he did not grasp, and was therefore obliged to forge a legend which should account for her peculiar appearance. Melusina was a mermaid. Her presence beside the fountain, as

well as her fishy tail, indicate her nature ; she was not, perhaps, a native of the sea, but a stream-dweller, and therefore as closely related to the true mermaid of the briny deep as are the fresh-water fish to those of the salt sea.

The superstitious belief in mermaids is universal, and I frankly confess my inability to account for its origin in every case. In some particular cases the origin of the myth is clear, in others it is not so. Let me take one which can be explained—the Oannes of the Chaldæans, the Philistine Dagon.

Oannes and Dag-on (the fish On) are identical. According to an ancient fable preserved by Berosus, a creature half man and half fish came out of “that part of the Erythræan sea which borders upon Babylonia,” where he taught men the arts of life, “to construct cities, to found temples, to compile laws, and, in short, instructed them in all things that tend to soften manners and humanize their lives ;” and he adds that a representation of this animal Oannes was preserved in his day. A figure of him sporting in the waves, and apparently blessing a fleet of vessels, was discovered in a marine piece of sculpture, by M. Botta, in the excavations of Khorsabad.



Oannes, from Khorsabad.

At Nimroud, a gigantic image was found by Mr. Layard, representing him with the fish's head as a cap and the body of the fish depending over his shoulders, his legs those of a man, in his left hand holding a richly decorated bag, and his right hand upraised, as if in the act of presenting the mystic Assyrian fir-cone (British Museum, Nos. 29 and 30).

This Oannes is the Mizraimite On, and the Hebrew Aon, with a Greek case-termination, derived from a root signifying "to illumine." Aon was the original name of the god revered in the temple of Heliopolis, which in Scripture is called Beth-Aon, the house of On, as well as by its translation Beth-Shemesh, the house of the Sun. Not only does his name indicate his solar origin, but his representation with horned head-dress testifies to his nature. Ammon, Apis, Dionysos are sun-gods; Isis, Io,

Artemis are moon-goddesses, and are all horned. Indeed, in ancient iconography horns invariably connect the gods represented with the two great sources of light. Apparent exceptions, such as the Fauns, are not so in reality, when subjected to close scrutiny. Civilizing gods, who diffuse intelligence and instruct barbarians, are also solar deities; as the Egyptian Osiris, the Nabathæan Tammuz, the Greek Apollo, and the Mexican Quetzalcoatl; beside these Oannes takes his place, as the sun-god, giving knowledge and civilization. According to



A Babylonish seal in the British Museum, from Munter's *Babylonien*.

the fable related by Berosus, he came on earth each morning, and at evening plunged into the sea; this is a mythical description of the rising and setting of the sun. His semi-piscine form was an expression of the idea that half his time was spent above ground, and half below the waves.

In precisely similar manner the Semitic moon-goddess, who followed the course of the sun, at times manifesting herself to the eyes of men, at others seeking concealment in the western flood was represented as half woman, half fish, with characteristics which make her lunar origin indisputable. Her name was Derceto or Atergatis. On the coins of Ascalon, where she was held in great honour, is figured a goddess above whose head is a half-moon, and at her feet a woman with her lower extremities like a fish. This is Semiramis, who, according to a popular legend, was the child of Derceto. At Joppa she appears as a mermaid. The story was, that she fled from Typhon, and plunged into the sea, concealing herself under the form of a fish. According to Plutarch, the Syrian Tirgata, the Derceto of Palestine, was the goddess of moisture⁶; and Lucan (*De dea Syra*, c. 14) declares that she was represented as a woman with a fish-tail from her hips downward.

In every mythology, the different attributes of

⁶ Plutarch, *Crass.* c. 17. According to Greek mythology, this goddess, under the name of Ceto, "with comely cheeks," is the daughter of Sea and Earth, and wife of Phorcys (*Hesiod*, *Theog.* v. 235. 270).

the deity in process of time became distinct gods, yet with sufficient impress of their origin still upon them to make that origin easy to be detected.

As On, the sun-god rising and setting in the sea, was supplied with a corresponding moon-goddess, Atergatis, and Bēl or Baal, also a solar deity, had his lunar Baalti, so the fiery Moloch, "the great lord," was supplied with his Mylitta, "the birth-producer." Moloch was the fierce flame-god, and Mylitta the goddess of moisture. Their worship was closely united. The priests of Moloch wore female attire, the priestesses of Mylitta were dressed like men. Human sacrifices characterized the worship of the fire-god, prostitution that of the goddess of water. From her came the names of the hetaræ Melitta, Meleto, Milto, Milesia (Athenæus, lib. xiii.). Among the Carthaginians, this goddess was worshipped, as appears from their giving the name of Magasmelita (the tent of Mylitta) to one of the African provinces. Mylitta was identical with Atergatis; she was regarded as a universal mother, a source of life.

In Greece, the priestesses of Demeter were called *Melissæ*, the high-priest of Apollo was entitled *κύριος τῶν μελλισσῶν*. A fable was invented to account for this name, and to connect

them with bees and honey ; but I have little doubt that it was corrupted from the Semitic designation of the servants of Mylitta. The *Melissæ* are sometimes spoken of as nymphs, but are not to be identified with the *Meliadæ*, Dryads sprung from the ash. Yet *Melia*, daughter of *Oceanus*, who plunges into the *Haliacmon*, strongly resembles the Syrian goddess. *Selene*, the moon, was also known by the name *Melissa*. *Καὶ τὰς Δήμητρος ἱερείας, ὡς τῆς χθονίας θεᾶς μυστίδας, μελισσας οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐκάλουν, αὐτὴν τε τὴν Κόρην μελισσώδη, Σελήνην τε, οὖσαν γενέσεως προστατίδα μέλισσαν ἐκάλουν*⁷.

When we remember the double character of *Mylitta*, as a generative or all-mother, and as a moon-goddess, we are able to account for her name having passed into the Greek titles of priestesses of their corresponding goddesses *Demeter* and *Selene*.

The name *Melissa* was probably introduced into *Gaul* by the *Phocian* colony at *Massilia*, the modern *Marseilles*, and passed into the popular mythology of the *Gallic Kelts* as the title of nymphs, till it was finally appropriated by the *Melusina* of romance.

⁷ Schol. Theocr. xv. 94. Porphy. de Antro Nymph. c. 18.

It may seem difficult at first sight to trace the connexion between the moon, a water-goddess, and a deity presiding over childbirth; yet it is certain that such a connexion does exist. The classic Venus was born of the sea-foam, and was unmistakably one with the moon. She was also the goddess of love, and was resorted to by barren women—as the Venus of Quimperle in Brittany is, to this day, sought by those who have no children.

On the Syrian coast, they told of their goddess plunging into the sea, because they saw the moon descend into the western waters; but the Cretans, who beheld her rise above the eastern horizon of sea, fabled of a foam-born goddess.

In classic iconography the Tritons, and in later art the Sirens, are represented half fish, half human. Originally the Sirens were winged, but after the fable had been accepted, which told of their strife with the Muses, and their precipitation into the sea, they were figured like mermaids; the fish-form was by them borrowed from Derceto. It is curious how widely-spread is the belief in fish-women. The prevalence of tales of mermaids among Celtic populations indicates these water-nymphs as having been originally deities of those

peoples ; and I cannot but believe that the circular mirror they are usually represented as holding is a reminiscence of the moon-disk. Bothe, in his "Kronecke der Sassen," in 1492, described a god, Krodo, worshipped in the Hartz, who was represented with his feet on a fish, a wheel to symbolize the moon in one hand, and a pail of water in the other. As among the Northern nations the moon is masculine, its deity was male. Probably the Mexican Coxcox or Teocipactli (i.e. Fish-god) was either a solar or lunar deity. He was entitled Huehueton-acateo-cateo-cipatli, or Fish-god-of-our-flesh, to give him his name in full ; he somewhat resembled the Noah of Sacred Writ ; for the Mexican fable related, that in a great time of flood, when the earth was covered with water, he rescued himself in a cypress trunk, and peopled the world with wise and intelligent beings *. The Babylonish Oannes was also identified with the flood.

The Peruvians had likewise their semi-fish gods, but the legend connected with them has not descended to our days.

The North-American Indians relate that they were conducted from Northern Asia by a man-fish.

* Müller, Geschichte der Amerikanischen Urreligionen. Basel, 1855, p. 515.

“Once upon a time, in the season of opening buds, the people of our nation were much terrified at seeing a strange creature, much resembling a man, riding upon the waves. He had upon his head long green hair, much resembling the coarse weeds which the mighty storms scatter along the margin of the strand. Upon his face, which was shaped like that of a porpoise, he had a beard of the same colour. But if our people were frightened at seeing a man who could live in the water like a fish or a duck, how much more were they frightened when they saw that from his breast down he was actually a fish, or rather two fishes, for each of his legs was a whole and distinct fish. And there he would sit for hours singing to the wondering ears of the Indians the beautiful things he saw in the depths of the ocean, always closing his strange stories with these words:—‘Follow me, and see what I will show you.’ For a great many suns, they dared not venture upon the water; but when they grew hungry, they at last put to sea, and following the man-fish, who kept close to the boat, reached the American coast⁹.”

It is not impossible that the North-American

⁹ Epitomized from Traditions of the North-American Indians, by J. A. Jones. 1830, pp. 47—58.

Indians may have symbolized the sun in the same manner as the Syrians, and that this legend may signify that the early colonists, to reach the New Land, followed the *fish*-course of the sun, which as man goes from East to West, whereas when it dives it swims from West to East, the course taken by the Indians in their canoes. The wanderers in the Canadian forests have also their fish-woman, of whom a tale is related which bears a lively resemblance to that of Undine, and which is not a little like that of Melusina.

One day an Ottawa chief, whilst sitting by the water side, beheld a beautiful woman rise from the flood, her face exquisitely lovely, her eyes blue, her teeth white, and her locks floating over her shoulders. From her waist downwards she was fish, or rather two fishes. She entreated the warrior to permit her to live on earth, as she desired to win a human soul, which could only be acquired by union with a mortal. He consented and took her to his house, where she was to him as a daughter. Some years after an Andirondack youth beheld and loved her. He took her to wife, and she obtained that which she had desired—a human soul.

In the Undine story, a water-maiden, in like

manner and for a like object, is adopted by an old fisherman, and becomes the bride of a youthful German knight. But the Andirondack tribe was ill-pleased at the marriage of their chief with the mysterious damsel, and they tore her from his arms, and drove her back to her original element. Then all the water-spirits vowed revenge at the insult offered to one of their race; they stirred up war between the Ottawas and Andirondacks, which led to the extermination of the latter; one only was rescued, and he was grasped by the fish-wife, and by her borne down to the watery depths below the Falls of S. Anthony. In the German story, the husband is weary with the taunts of those around at having married a water-sprite, and bids her return to her element. Then the spirits of the flood vow his destruction, and send Undine on earth to embrace her faithless lord, and kiss him to death. The name of the fish-woman is in German Meerfrau or Meriminni; in Danish, the Siren is Maremind; and in Icelandic and old Norse, Marmennill; in Irish she is the Merrow; with the Breton peasantry she is Marie-Morgan. In the legendary lore of all these people, there are stories of the loves of a mortal man and a mermaid. According to Mr. Crofton Croker, O'Sullivan

More, Lord of Dunkerron, lost his heart to one of these beautiful water-sprites, and she agreed to be his, but her parents resented the union and killed her.

On the shore of Smerwick harbour, an Irishman, Dick Fitzgerald, caught a Merrow with her *cohuleen driuth*, or enchanted cap, lying on a rock beside her. He grasped the cap, and thereby possessed himself of the nymph, who, however, seemed nothing loth to obtain a mortal husband. They lived together happily for some years, and saw a family of beautiful children grow up at their knees. But one day the Lady of Gollerus, as she was called, discovered her old cap in a corner. She took it up and looked at it, and then thought of her father the king and her mother the queen, and felt a longing to go back to them. She kissed the babies, and then went down to the strand with the full intention of returning to Gollerus after a brief visit to her home. However, no sooner was the *cohuleen driuth* on her head, than all remembrance of her life on earth was forgotten, and she plunged into the sea, never to return. Similar tales are related in Shetland, the Faroes, in Iceland, and Norway.

Vade, the father of the famous smith Velund,

was the son of King Vilkin and a mermaid whom he met in a wood on the sea-shore in Russia¹. In the Saga of Half and his knights is an account of a merman who was caught and kept a little while on land. He sang the following entreaty to be taken back to his native element—

“ Cold water to the eyes !
 Flesh raw to the teeth !
 A shroud to the dead !
 Flit me back to the sea !
 Henceforward never
 Men in ships sailing !
 Draw me to dry land
 From the depth of the sea² !”

In the “*Speculum Regale*,” an Icelandic work of the twelfth century, is the following description of a mermaid :—

“ A monster is seen also near Greenland, which people call the Margygr. This creature appears like a woman as far down as her waist, with breast and bosom like a woman, long hands, and soft hair, the neck and head in all respects like those of a human being. The hands seem to people to be long, and the fingers not to be parted, but united by a web like that on the feet of water-

¹ Vilkina Saga, c. 18.

² Halfs Saga ok rekum hans, c. 7.

birds. From the waist downwards, this monster resembles a fish, with scales, tail, and fins. This prodigy is believed to show itself especially before heavy storms. The habit of this creature is to dive frequently and rise again to the surface with fishes in its hands. When sailors see it playing with the fish, or throwing them towards the ship, they fear that they are doomed to lose several of the crew ; but when it casts the fish, or, turning from the vessel, flings them away from her, then the sailors take it as a good omen that they will not suffer loss in the impending storm. This monster has a very horrible face, with broad brow and piercing eyes, a wide mouth, and double chin³." The Landnama, or Icelandic Doomsday book, speaks of a Marmennill, or merman, having been caught off the island of Grimsey ; and the annals of the same country relate the appearance of these beings off the coast in 1305 and in 1329.

Megasthenes reported that the sea which washed Taprobane, the modern Ceylon, was inhabited by a creature having the appearance of a woman ; and Ælian improved this account, by stating that there are whales having the form of Satyrs. In 1187, a

³ Quoted in "Iceland, its Scenes and Sagas," p. 349.

merman was fished up off the coast of Suffolk. It closely resembled a man, but was not gifted with speech. One day, when it had the opportunity to escape, it fled to the sea, plunged in, and was never seen again. Pontoppidan records the appearance of a merman, which was deposed to on oath by the observers.

“About a mile from the coast of Denmark, near Landscrona, three sailors, observing something like a dead body floating in the water, rowed towards it. When they came within seven or eight fathoms, it still appeared as at first, for it had not stirred; but at that instant it sank, and came up almost immediately in the same place. Upon this, out of fear, they lay still, and then let the boat float, that they might the better examine the monster, which, by the help of the current, came nearer and nearer to them. He turned his face and stared at them, which gave them a good opportunity of examining him narrowly. He stood in the same place for seven or eight minutes, and was seen above the water breast-high. At last they grew apprehensive of some danger, and began to retire; upon which the monster blew up his cheeks and made a kind of lowing noise, and then dived from their view. In regard to his form, they declare in their affidavits, which were

regularly taken and recorded, that he appeared like an old man, strong limbed, with broad shoulders, but his arms they could not see. His head was small in proportion to his body, and had short, curled black hair, which did not reach below his ears; his eyes lay deep in his head, and he had a meagre face, with a black beard; about the body downwards, this merman was quite pointed like a fish.¹

In the year 1430, after a violent tempest, which broke down the dykes in Holland and flooded the low lands, some girls of the town of Edam in West Friesland, going in a boat to milk their cows, observed a mermaid in shallow water and embarrassed in the mud.

They took it into their boat and brought it into Edam, dressed it in female attire, and taught it to spin. It fed with them, but never could be taught to speak. It was afterwards brought to Haerlem, where it lived for several years, though still showing a strong inclination for water. Parival, in his "*Délices de Hollande*," relates that it was instructed in its duty to God, and that it made reverences before a crucifix. Old Hudson, the navigator, in

¹ Pontoppidan's *Nat. Hist. of Norway*, p. 154.

his dry and ponderous narrative, records the following incident, when trying to force a passage to the pole near Nova Zembla, lat. 75° , on the 15th June. "This morning, one of our company looking overboard saw a mermaid ; and calling up some of the company to see her, one more came up, and by that time she was come close to the ship's side, looking earnestly at the men. A little after, a sea came and overturned her. From the navel upward, her back and breasts were like a woman's, as they say that saw her ; her body as big as one of us, her skin very white, and long hair hanging down behind, of colour black. In her going down they saw her tail, which was like the tail of a porpoise, speckled like a mackerel. Their names that saw her were Thomas Hilles and Robert Rayner."

In 1560, near the island of Mandar, on the west of Ceylon, some fishermen entrapped in their net seven mermen and mermaids, of which several Jesuits, and Father Henriques, and Bosquez, physician to the Viceroy of Goa, were witnesses. The physician examined them with a great deal of care, and dissected them. He asserts that the internal and external structure resembled that of human beings. We have another account of a merman seen near the great rock Diamon, on the

coast of Martinique. The persons who saw it gave a precise description of it before a notary ; they affirmed that they saw it wipe its hands over its face, and even heard it blow its nose. Another creature of the same species was captured in the Baltic in 1531, and sent as a present to Sigismund, King of Poland, with whom it lived three days, and was seen by all the Court. Another was taken near Rocca de Sintra, as related by Damian Goes. The King of Portugal and the Grand-Master of the Order of S. James are said to have had a suit at law, to determine which party the creature belonged to.

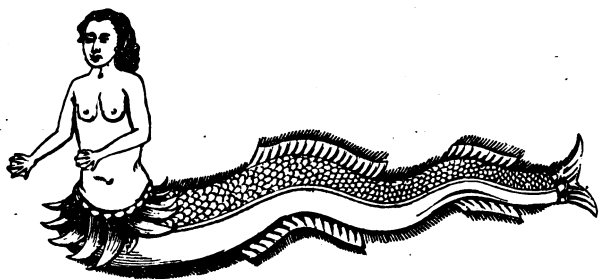
Captain Weddell, well known for his geographical discoveries in the extreme south of the globe, relates the following story:—"A boat's crew were employed on Hall's Island, when one of the crew, left to take care of some produce, saw an animal whose voice was even musical. The sailor had lain down, and about ten o'clock he heard a noise resembling human cries ; and as daylight in these latitudes never disappears at this season, he rose and looked around, but, on seeing no person, returned to bed. Presently he heard the noise again, rose a second time, but still saw nothing. Conceiving, however, the possibility of a boat

being upset, and that some of the crew might be clinging to some detached rocks, he walked along the beach a few steps, and heard the noise more distinctly, but in a musical strain. Upon searching round, he saw an object lying on a rock a dozen yards from the shore, at which he was somewhat frightened. The face and shoulders appeared of human form, and of a reddish colour; over the shoulders hung long green hair; the tail resembled that of the seal, but the extremities of the arms he could not see distinctly. The creature continued to make a musical noise while he gazed about two minutes, and on perceiving him it disappeared in an instant. Immediately when the man saw his officer, he told this wild tale, and to add weight to his testimony (being a Romanist) he made a cross on the sand, which he kissed, as making oath to the truth of his statement. When I saw him, he told the story in so clear and positive a manner, making oath to its truth, that I concluded he must really have seen the animal he described, or that it must have been the effect of a disturbed imagination⁶."

In a splendidly illustrated work with plates

⁶ Voyage towards the South Pole, p. 143, quoted by Goss: Romance of Nat. Hist., 2nd Series.

coloured by hand, "Poissons, écrevisses et crabes de diverses couleurs et figures extraordinaires, que l'on trouve autour des Isles Moluques," dedicated to King George of England, and published by Louis Renard at Amsterdam, in 1717, is a curious account of a mermaid. This book was the result of thirty years' labour, in the Indian seas, by Blatazar Coyett, Governor of the Islands of the



Province of Amboine and President of the Commissioners in Batavia, and by Adrien Van der Stell, Governor Regent of the Province of Amboine. In the 2nd volume, p. 240, is the picture of a mermaid here reproduced, and the subjoined description:—

“See-wyf. A monster resembling a Siren, caught near the island of Borné, or Boeren, in the Department of Amboine. It was 59 inches long, and in proportion as an eel. It lived on land, in a vat full of water, during four days seven hours. From

time to time it uttered little cries like those of a mouse. It would not eat, though it was offered small fish, shells, crabs, lobsters, &c. After its death, some excrement was discovered in the vat, like the secretion of a cat." The copy from which I have taken the representation for this work is thus coloured: hair, the hue of kelp; body, olive tint; webbed olive between the fingers, which have each four joints; the fringe round the waist orange, with a blue border; the fins green, face slate-grey; a delicate row of pink hairs runs the length of the tail.

With such a portrait we may well ask with Tennyson—

“Who would be
A mermaid fair,
Singing alone,
Combing her hair
Under the sea
In a golden curl,
With a comb of pearl,
On a throne?”

The introduction to the book contains additional information.

The *Avertissement de l'Editeur* says:—“M. Baltazar Coyett is the first to whom the great discovery is due. Whilst governor, he encouraged the fishery of these fishes; and after having had about two hundred painted of those which were

brought to his home by the Indians of Amboine and the neighbouring isles, as well as by the Dutch there settled, he formed of them two collections, the originals of which were brought by his son to M. Scott the Elder, who was then chief advocate, or prime minister, of the Company General of the East Indies at Amsterdam. He had them copied exactly. The second volume, *less correct* indeed in the exactitude of the drawings, but very curious on account of the novelties wherewith it is filled, and of the remarks accompanying each fish, was taken from the collection of M. Van der Stell, Governor of the Moluccas, by a painter named Gamael Fallours, who brought them to me from the Indies, and of which I have selected about 250. Moreover, to check incredulity in certain persons, I have thought fit to subjoin the following certificates." Among them, the most curious are those relating to the mermaid.

Letter from Renard, the publisher, to M. François Valentyn, minister of the Gospel at Dort, late superintendent of the churches in the colonies, dated Amsterdam, Dec. 17, 1716.

" Monsieur,

" His Majesty the Czar of Muscovy having

done me the honour of visiting my house, and having had occasion to show the prince the work on the fishes of the Molucca islands, by the Sieur Fallours, in which, among other drawings, is the enclosed plate, representing a monster resembling a Siren, which this painter says that he saw alive for four days at Amboine, as you will be pleased to see in the writing with his own hand, which accompanies this picture, and as he believes that M. Van der Stell, the present Governor of Amboine, may have sent it to you, I remarked that his Majesty the Czar would be much gratified to have this fact substantiated ; wherefore I shall be greatly obliged if you will favour me with a reply.

“I remain, &c.”

REPLY.

“DORT, *Dec.* 18, 1716.

“Monsieur,

“It is not impossible that, since my departure from the Indies, Fallours may have seen at Amboine the monster whose picture you had the courtesy to send me, and which I return enclosed ; but up to the present moment I have neither seen nor heard of the original. If I had the creature, I would with all my heart make a present of it to

his Majesty the Czar, whose application in the research of objects of curiosity deserves the praise of all the world. But, sir, as evidence that there are monsters in nature resembling this Siren, I may say that I know for certain, that in the year 1652 or 1653 a lieutenant in the service of the Company saw two of these beings in the gulf, near the village of Hennetelo, near the islands of Ceram and Bœro, in the Department of Amboine. They were swimming side by side, which made him presume that one was male, the other female. Six weeks after they reappeared in the same spot, and were seen by more than fifty persons. These monsters were of a greenish grey colour, having precisely the shape of human beings from the head to the waist, with arms and hands, but their bodies tapered away. One was larger than the other; their hair was moderately long. I may add that, on my way back from the Indies, in which I resided thirty years, I saw, on the 1st May, 1714, long. $12^{\circ} 18'$, and on the Meridian, during clear, calm weather, at the distance of three or four ship-lengths off, a monster, which was apparently a sort of marine-man, of a bluish grey (*gris de mer*). It was raised well above the surface, and seemed to have a sort of fisher's cap of moss on its head. All the ship's

company saw it, as well as myself; but although its back was turned towards us, the monster seemed conscious that we were approaching too near, and it dived suddenly under water, and we saw it no more.

“I am, &c.,

“F. VALENTYN.”

Letter from M. Parent, Pastor of the church of Amsterdam, written and exhibited before the notary Jacob Lansman.

“AMSTERDAM, *July 15, 1717.*

“Monsieur,

“I have seen with mingled pleasure and surprise the illuminated proofs of the beautiful plates which you have had engraved, representing the fishes of Molucca, which were painted from nature by the Sieur Samuel Fallours, with whom I was acquainted when at Amboine. I own, sir, that I was struck with astonishment at the sight of this work, the engravings of which closely resemble the fishes I have seen during my life, and which, or some of which, I have had the pleasure of eating during the thirteen years I resided at Amboine, from which I returned with the fleet in 1716. . . . Touching your inquiry, whether I ever saw a

Siren in that country, I reply that, whilst making the circuit of our churches in the Molucca Isles (which is done twice in the year by the pastors who understand the language of the country), and navigating in an *orambay*, or species of galley, between the villages of Holilieuw and Karieuw, distant from one another about two leagues by water, it happened, whilst I was dozing, that the negro rowers uttered a shrill cry of astonishment, which aroused me with a start; and when I inquired the cause of their outcry, they replied unanimously that they had seen clearly and distinctly a monster like a Siren, with a face resembling that of a man, and long hair like that of a woman floating down its back; but at their cry it had replunged into the sea, and all I could see was the agitation of the water where this Siren had disturbed it by diving.

“I am, sir, &c.,

“PARENT.”

One of the most remarkable accounts of a mermaid is that in Dr. Robert Hamilton's "History of the Whales and Seals," in the "Naturalist's Library," he himself vouching for its general truth, from personal knowledge of some of the parties. "It was reported that a fishing-boat off the island,

of Yell, one of the Shetland group, had captured a mermaid by its getting entangled in the lines." The statement is, that the animal was about three feet long, the upper part of the body resembling the human, with protuberant mammæ, like a woman; the face, the forehead, and neck were short, and resembling those of a monkey; the arms, which were small, were kept folded across the breast; the fingers were distinct, not webbed; a few stiff, long bristles were on the top of the head, extending down to the shoulders, and these it could erect and depress at pleasure, something like a crest. The inferior part of the body was like a fish. The skin was smooth, and of a grey colour. It offered no resistance, nor attempted to bite, but uttered a low, plaintive sound. The crew, six in number, took it within their boat; but superstition getting the better of curiosity, they carefully disentangled it from the lines and from a hook which had accidentally fastened in its body, and returned it to its native element. It instantly dived, descending in a perpendicular direction.

"After writing the above, (we are informed) the narrator had an interview with the skipper of the boat and one of the crew, from whom he learned the following additional particulars. They had

the animal for three hours within the boat ; the body was without scales or hair, was of a silver-grey colour above and white below, like the human skin ; no gills were observed, nor fins on the back or belly ; the tail was like that of the dog-fish ; the mammæ were about as large as those of a woman ; the mouth and lips were very distinct, and resembled the human. This communication was from Mr. Edmonton, a well-known and intelligent observer, to the distinguished professor of natural history in the Edinburgh University ; and Mr. E. adds a few reflections, which are so pertinent that we shall avail ourselves of them. That a very peculiar animal has been taken, no one can doubt. It was seen and handled by six men on one occasion and for some time, not one of whom dreams of a doubt of its being a mermaid. If it were supposed that their fears magnified its supposed resemblance to the human form, it must at all events be admitted that there was some ground for exciting these fears. But no such fears were likely to be entertained ; for the mermaid is not an object of terror to the fisherman : it is rather a welcome guest, and danger is to be apprehended only from its experiencing bad treatment. The usual resources of scepticism, that the seals and other sea-animals,

appearing under certain circumstances, operating on an excited imagination, and so producing ocular illusion, cannot avail here. It is quite impossible that, under the circumstances, six Shetland fishermen could commit such a mistake."

One of these creatures was found in the belly of a shark, on the north-west coast of Iceland, and is thus described by Wernhard Guthmund's son, priest of Ottrardale:—

"The lower part of the animal was entirely eaten away, whilst the upper part, from the epigastric and hypogastric region, was in some places partially eaten, in others completely devoured. The sternum, or breast-bone, was perfect. This animal appeared to be about the size of a boy eight or nine years old, and its head was formed like that of a man. The anterior surface of the occiput was very protuberant, and the nape of the neck had a considerable indentation or sinking. The alæ of the ears were very large, and extended a good way back. It had front teeth, which were long and pointed, as were also the larger teeth. The eyes were lustreless, and resembled those of a codfish. It had on its head long black, coarse hair, very similar to the *fucus filiformis*; this hair hung over the shoulders. Its

forehead was large and round. The skin above the eyelids was much wrinkled, scanty, and of a bright olive colour, which was indeed the hue of the whole body. The chin was cloven, the shoulders were high, and the neck uncommonly short. The arms were of their natural size, and each hand had a thumb and four fingers covered with flesh. Its breast was formed exactly like that of a man, and there was also to be seen something like nipples; the back was also like that of a man. It had very cartilaginous ribs; and in parts where the skin had been rubbed off, a black, coarse flesh was perceptible, very similar to that of the seal. This animal, after having been exposed about a week on the shore, was again thrown into the sea*.”

To the manufactured mermaids which come from Japan, and which are exhibited at shows, it is not necessary to do more than allude; they testify to the Japanese conception of a sea-creature resembling the Tritons of ancient Greece, the Syrian On and Derceto, the Scandinavian Marmennill, and the Mexican Coxcox.

* Quoted in my “Iceland, its Scenes and Sagas.”