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*Natural history, lore and legend*

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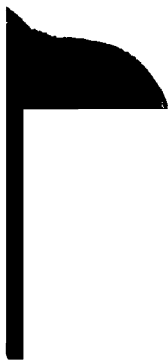
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NATURAL HISTORY LORE AND LEGEND





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NATURAL HISTORY  
LORE AND LEGEND

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BEING SOME FEW EXAMPLES OF QUAIN'T AND BY-GONE BELIEFS  
GATHERED IN FROM DIVERS AUTHORITIES, ANCIENT AND  
MEDIÆVAL, OF VARYING DEGREES OF RELIABILITY

BY  
*Frederick*  
F. EDWARD HULME, F.L.S., F.S.A.

AUTHOR OF

"WAYSIDE SKETCHES," "SUGGESTIONS IN FLORAL DESIGN," "FAMILIAR  
WILD FLOWERS," AND DIVERS OTHER BOOKS THAT NEED NOT  
HERE BE SET FORTH

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"As some delighte moste to beholde  
Eche newe devyse and guyse,  
So some in workes of fathers olde  
Their studies exercise."

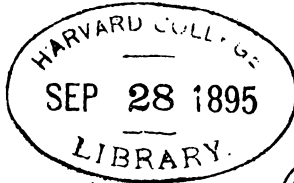
*"Historicall Expostulation" of John Halle,  
Chyrurgeon, A.D. 1565*

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our old friend the man with the single immense foot, the one-eyed man, a two-headed fellow, the headless man with his eyes and other features in his chest,\* whose acquaintance we have made in fig. 1, and a wolf-headed man, are all grouped together as a matter of course, leaving the observer to conclude that anyone strolling through Central Africa would any day expect to come across such a gathering.

The classic myth of the centaur crops up again in the mediæval Ipotayne. These "dwellen somtymes in the Watre and somtyme on the Lond, and thei ben half Man and half Hors, and thei eten men† whan thei may take hem." Pliny writes of the *Ægipanæ*, half beasts, "shaped as you see them commonly painted," a terse description that may have been amply sufficient for his original readers, but which leaves later generations considerably in the dark.

The belief in the mermaid was to our ancestors as real as the belief in the mackerel; and though

\* "Who would believe that there were mountaineers,  
Dewlapped like bulls, whose throats had hanging at them  
Wallets of flesh? Or that there were such men  
Whose heads stood in their breasts?"

GONZALE in the "*Tempest*."

† Robertson, in his "History of America," Vol. II., p. 525, says of the Spaniards, "that they and their horses were objects of the greatest astonishment to all the people of New Spain. At first they imagined the horse and his rider, like the centaurs of the ancients, to be some monstrous animal of a terrible form. Even after they had discovered the mistake they believed the horses devoured men in battle, and when they neighed, thought that they were demanding their prey."

we have in these later days surrounded all with an air of romance, the mermaid was to them no myth or poetic fancy, but as genuine an article of credence as any other creature of earth, or air, or sea. Physiologus simply calls it "a beast of the sea," which is a very unpoetic definition indeed; while Boswell in like manner calls it "a sea beast wonderfully shapen." Nowadays one's notion of a mermaid is of a fair creature, half woman half fish, basking amongst the rocks or rocking on the waves, and engaged in nothing more arduous than alternately combing her flowing golden tresses in the sunlight, and gazing in her constant travelling companion, her mirror, to study the effect of her work. The mediæval mermaid was of sterner temper; one old writer says that "they please shipmen greatly with their song that they draw them to peril and shipwreck;" while another affirms that "this beast is glad and merry in tempest, and heavy and sad in faire weather." *Bœwulf*, the Saxon poet, styles the mermaid—

"The sea-wolf of the abyss,  
The mighty sea-woman."

The syren myth of the ancients is clearly the origin of this belief in the malevolence of the mermaid. These syrens, to quote Spencer's "*Fairie Queen*,"

"Were faire ladies, till they fondly strived  
With th' Heliconian Maides for mastery:  
Of whom they overcomen were depriv'd  
Of their proud beautie, and th' one moyity

Transform'd to fish, for their bold surquedry :  
But th' upper half their hew retayned still,  
And their sweet skill in wonted melody  
Which ever after they abused to ill,\*  
T' allure weake travellers whom gotten they did kill."

The writer of the "Speculum Mundi" believed in mermaids as firmly as his contemporaries did, but he departs somewhat from the traditional lines of belief, and instead of making his mermaids brewers of the storms, sees in them merely rather exceptionally weather-wise and gifted prophets of the coming tempest. He says of them : "The mermaids and men-fish seem to me the most strange fish in the waters. Some have supposed them to be devils or spirits, in regard of their whooping noise that they make. For (as if they had power to raise extraordinary storms and tempests) the windes blow, seas rage, and clouds drop presently after they seem to call." This was the popular belief, but he explains matters as follows :—"Questionlesse that Nature's instinct makes in them a quicker insight and more sudden feeling and foresight of those things than is in man, which we see even in other creatures upon earth, as fowles, who feeling the alteration of the aire in their feathers and quills, do plainly prognosticate a change of weather before it appeareth to us." So that really the bellowing of these maidens is brought down to the level of

\* In the "Eastern Travels of John of Hesse," amongst perils of voyage, we read :—"We came to a stony mountain, where we heard syrens singing, meermaids who draw ships into danger by their songs. We saw there many horrible monsters and were in great fear."

cock-crowing, the braying of the ass,\* or the scream of the peacock, as indications of weather-changes.

The classic writers limited the number of their syrens to three ordinarily, though they were not quite unanimous as to the exact number, while the mediæval mermaids were simply as unnumbered and as un-named denizens of the deep as the cod-fish. In mediæval times the mermaidens were not ordinarily credited with any particular musical gifts, though we remember seeing a Gothic carving of one playing on a violin. It will be remembered that with their antique prototypes the musical part of the entertainment was a very conspicuous feature :—

“ Withe pleasaunte tunes the syrenes did allure,  
 Vlisses wise, to listen to theire songe :  
 But nothinge could his manlie harte procure,  
 He sailde awaie, and scaped their charming stronge,  
 The face he likde ; the nether parte did loathe,  
 For woman's shape, and fishes, had they bothe.

Which shoves to us, when Bewtie seeks to snare  
 The carelesse man, who dothe no daunger dreede,  
 That he should flie, and should in time beware,  
 And not on lookes his fickle fancie feede:

Such Mairemaides liue, that promise onelie ioyes,  
 But he that yeldes at lengthe him selffe distroies.” †

We will consider first the mermaid of the artist and the poet, and then see how the poetic

\* As the old adage hath it :—

“ When that the ass begins to bray,  
 Be sure we shall have rain that day.”

† “ A maiden strangely fãir, but strangely formed,  
 Rises from out the pool, and by her songs  
 And heavenly beauty lures to shameful death  
 The luckless wight who hears her melodies.”—*Kirke.*

and artistic type tallies with, or differs from, the mermaid as the ancient voyager vouches for her from ocular demonstration. Naturally the poets were unwilling to surrender the sweet song of the mermaid, and the bellowing and whooping of the matter-of-fact naturalists becomes with the poets a "dulcet and harmonious breath." All our readers must be familiar with the beautiful passage in the "Midsummer Night's Dream":—

" I sat upon a promontory,  
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back  
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,  
That the rude sea grew civil at her song ;  
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres  
To hear the sea-maid's music."\*

Several other allusions to the mermaid will be found in the writings of Shakespeare and many others of our poets, though it would be somewhat foreign to our purpose to quote them at any length, fascinating as the subject would be. Our present prosaic intent is but to introduce the poets as witnesses to the widespread belief in such a creature as the mermaid and to show their sympathy with it.

In mediæval heraldry the mermaid frequently appears as a charge upon the shield, as a supporter of the arms, and as the surmounting crest. Any book upon heraldry will supply illustrations

\* Allusive to Mary Queen of Scots and to the Duke of Norfolk, and the Earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland, who fell from their allegiance to Elizabeth by the witchery of Mary. She was celebrated for the melody of her singing. The reference to the dolphin alludes to her marriage with the Dauphin of France.

of this. We need only now refer to the allusive use of the charge in the arms of the ancient family of De La Mere, and to its occurrence as one of the badges adopted by the Black Prince. By his will in 1376 the Prince left to his son some hangings "de worstede embroidery avec mermyns de mier." The mermaid is found, too, sometimes on paving tiles, bells, and in Gothic stone and wood-carving. It may be seen, for example, in a boss at Exeter Cathedral. In Winchester Cathedral the mermaid holds the accustomed comb, while her companion merman grasps a captured fish. In Lyons Cathedral a mermaid, or we may perhaps more justly say a mer-matron, nurses a mer-baby. A mermaid will be found carved on one of the misereres of Henry VII.'s chapel. Another may be seen at Exeter Cathedral, and a very good one again on a bench end at Sherringham church.\* It is also well known as a tavern sign, and the first literary club ever founded in England, including amongst its members Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden and Carew, was established in 1603 at the Mermaid in Bread Street, Cheapside.

Scoresby in his account of the arctic regions says that the head of the young walrus is very human in appearance ; the creature has a way too of rearing itself well out of water to gaze at ships and other objects in a way that proves very suggestive of the mermaid idea. "I have myself,"

\* See some good figures, too, in the "Book of Emblems" of Alciatus, 1551.

he remarks, "seen one in such a position and under such circumstances, that it required very little stretch of imagination to mistake it for a human being. So like, indeed, was it, that the surgeon of the ship actually reported to me his having seen a man with his head just appearing above the water." It is probable that the various species of seals, too, are responsible for many of the mermaid and triton stories, as at a little distance, and amidst the spray dashing over the rocks, they are very human-looking—at all events, perhaps sufficiently so to satisfy the credulity of those whose superstition made them susceptible to such ideas. On the other hand, a whaler or other old salt who has seen thousands of seals should scarcely be imposed upon in this way under any possible circumstances. Let us turn, however, to some of the experiences of those who profess to have seen the real thing in the way of mermaids, and see what they can tell us.

Hudson, the great navigator, whose narrative is strikingly free from any touch of imagination, and may in fact almost without fear of libel be called dry and tedious, tells us, in the following words, of a curious incident that happened to them while forcing a passage through the ice near Nova Zembla: "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 on the men. A little while after a sea came and overturned her. From the navel upward her back

and breast were like a woman's, as they say that saw her ; her body as big as one of ours ; 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, and speckled like a mackerel. Their names that saw her were Thomas Hilles and Robert Rayney." "Whatever explanation," says Gosse, in commenting on this story of the old voyager in his "Romance of Natural History," "may be attempted of this apparition, the ordinary resource of seal and walrus will not avail here. Seals and walruses must have been as familiar to these polar mariners as cows to a milkmaid. Unless the whole story was a concocted lie between the two men, reasonless and objectless, and the worthy old navigator doubtless knew the character of his men, they must have seen some form of being as yet unrecognized."

In the "Speculum Regale," an Icelandic work of the twelfth century, we read of a creature that was to be found off the shores of Greenland—"like a woman as far down as her waist, long hands, and soft hair, the neck and head in all respects like those of a human being. The hands seem to be long, and the fingers not to be pointed, but united into a web like that on the feet of water birds. From the waist downwards this monster resembles a fish, with scales, tail, and fins. This shows 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 from the vessel, 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 chin." This is clearly a creature to be dreaded : we may, in fact, lay down the broad principle that the attractive and fascinating mermaid is the creation of the landsman and poet, while the sterner type is that of the mariner.

Pontoppidan, in his "Natural History of Norway," has his mermaid story, but it is too long to quote, and it is, moreover, needless to do so, as all these narratives follow much the same general lines. Captain John Smith, too, in his account of his expedition to America in 1614, has a similar experience to relate, and many narratives of like tenour might be found in various old writers, but we will now turn to one or two that not merely describe a mermaid and merman seen, but the creature actually captured.

The following news item, from the *Scots Magazine* for the year 1739, refers to a creature less piscine than the typical form, but coming sufficiently near it for inclusion. "They write from Vigo, in Spain, that some fishermen lately took on that coast a sort of monster, or merman, five feet and a half long from its foot to its head, which is like that of a goat. It has a long beard and moustachios, and black skin somewhat hairy, a very long neck,

short arms, and hands longer than they ought to be in proportion to the rest of the body : long fingers like those of a man, with nails like claws ; very long toes, joined like the feet of a duck, and the heels furnished with fins resembling the winged feet with which painters represent Mercury." We get considerably nearer the ideal in the seven mermaids that were said to be entrapped by some fishermen in their nets off Ceylon in the year 1560. Of these, several Jesuits, and the physician to the Viceroy of Goa, professed to be eye-witnesses, and the latter having dissected them with great care asserts that both the internal and external structure resembled that of human beings. Of the piscine moiety he appears to make no mention.

In the "Speculum Mundi" we have a very circumstantial account indeed of a mermaid who drifted inland through a broken dyke on the Dutch coast during a heavy storm, "and floating up and down and not finding a passage out againe (by reason that the breach was stopped after the flood), was espied by certain women and their servants as they went to milke their kine in the neighbouring pastures, who at the first were afraid of her, but seeing her often, they resolved to take her, which they did, and bringing her home, she suffered herself to be clothed and fed with bread and milk and other meats, and would often strive to steal again into the sea, but being carefully watched, she could not : moreover, she learned to spinne and perform other pettie offices of women, but at the first

they cleansed her of her sea-mosse, which did sticke about her. She never spake, but lived dumbe, and continued alive fifteene yeares ; then she died. They tooke her in the yeare of our Lord, 1403." One can scarcely wonder at the poor sea-maid endeavouring to escape ; the scraping down to get off the seaweed and barnacles prior to the introduction to the rough dress of a Dutch peasant and the homely lessons in spinning, bread-making, and other domestic cares, were a sad contrast to the life of wild freedom of yore amidst the rolling billows of the wild North Sea. We read, too, that she was taught to kneel before a crucifix—a task in itself, we should imagine, of considerable difficulty to a mermaid. When we read in another old author that "in the island Mauritius they eat of the mermaid, its taste is not unlike veal," the last vestige of the poetry of the belief vanishes, while the added detail that "when they are first taken they cry and grieve with great sensibility" seems to bring the indulgence in such diet almost to cannibalism.

From veal to the "maiden clothed alone in loveliness," of whom the poet sings, is a contrast indeed, and even the scraped mermaid turned Dutch vrouw is a very different creature to her whose—

"Golden hair fell o'er her shoulders white  
And curled in amorous ringlets round her breasts ;  
Her eyes were melting into love, her lips  
Had made the very roses envious ;  
Withal a voice so full and yet so clear,  
So tender, made for loving dialoges.

And then she sang—sang of undying love  
 That waited them within her coral groves  
 Beneath the deep blue sea, and all the bliss  
 That mortals made immortal could enjoy,  
 Who lived with her in sweet community.”

In an advertisement in the London *Daily Post*, of January 23rd, 1738, we read that there is “To be Seen, next door to the Crown Tavern in Threadneedle Street, behind the Royal Exchange, at One Shilling each, the Surprising Fish or Maremaid, taken by eight Fishermen on Friday the 9th of September last, at Topsham Bar, near Exeter, and has been shewn to several Gentlemen, and those of the Faculty, in the Cities of Exeter, Bath, and Bristol, who declare never to have seen the like, so remarkable is this Curiosity amongst the Wonders of Creation. This uncommon Species of Nature represents from the Collarbone down the Body what the Antients called a Maremaid, has a Wing to each Shoulder like those of a Cherubim mentioned in History, with regular Ribs, Breasts, Thighs, and Feet, the Joints thereto having their proper Motions, and to each Thigh a Fin; the Tail resembles a Dolphin’s, which turns up to the Shoulders, the forepart of the Body very smooth, but the skin of the Back rough; the back part of the Head like a Lyon, has a large Mouth, sharp Teeth, two Eyes, Spout holes, Nostrils, and a thick Neck.” This we may not uncharitably assume was less a mermaid than a swindle. While the advertisement tells us that the creature in question has been seen by several of

the faculty, it does not tell us what the faculty said when they saw it ! This is a very serious omission. This "Maremaid" does not altogether conform to the accepted type, feet, spout-holes, and cherubic wings being all abnormal developments.

There are, of course, at all times plenty of skilful knaves and unprincipled adventurers ready in divers ways to take advantage of the credulity of the public, and a belief in many absurdities has been maintained by the apparent evidence which the conniving of such persons has from time to time furnished. To say nothing of the impostures constantly practised at fairs and by travelling show-people, it was announced in the earlier days of the century that a party had arrived from abroad with a mermaid, and that it was to be exhibited in one of the leading streets in the West End of London. A good round fee was demanded for admission, and the dupes were shown a strange-looking object in a glass case, which was unblushingly declared to be a mermaid. But the imposture was too gross to last long ; it was ascertained to be the dried skin of the head and shoulders of a monkey attached to the skin of a fish of the salmon kind, with the head cut off, the whole being stuffed and highly varnished. This grotesque object was taken by a Dutch vessel from on board a native Malacca boat, and from the reverence shown it by the sailors it was probably an idol or fetish, the incarnation of some river-god of their mythology. Repulsive as the creature was, we have an illustration of it before us in a

newspaper of the year 1836. It achieved a great popularity, and the profits that accrued from the exhibition were, for some time, considerable, but the owners presently quarrelled amongst themselves, and the unpoetic ending of this monkey mermaiden was that she became the subject of a suit in Chancery. When one remembers the success that Barnum achieved amongst the credulous in very much more recent times with a stuffed mermaid, we can only feel that Carlyle was right in his liberal percentage of fools, and though in this case it was the cute Yankee and not the unsuspecting Britisher that succumbed, the truth of Southey's assertion that "man is a dupeable animal" holds equally good, and is of far-reaching application.

The "Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or Enquiries into very many received Tenents and commonly Presumed Truths, by Thomas Browne, Doctor of Physick," is a book far in advance of its time, and very interesting in showing what extraordinary beliefs were held at the time it was written. The copy open before us is the second edition, and is dated 1650. Some of the ideas combatted are "that Crystall is nothing else but Ice strongly congealed; the legend of the Wandering Jew; that a diamond is made soft by the blood of a goat; that an elephant hath no joynts; that a salamander lives in the fire; that storcks will only live in republics." To these fancies many others might be added, and some few of them that deal with the animal kingdom we shall have occasion to touch upon in the course of our book.

We naturally turn to Browne's remarks upon

mermaids, but we scarcely gather from them any definite idea as to his belief in the matter. Before quoting his remarks we must premise that his style of composition is somewhat stilted and pedantic. "Few eyes," saith he, "have escaped the Picture of Mermaids; that is, according to Horace, his monster, with woman's head above and fishing extremity below; and this is conceived to answer the shape of the ancient Syrens that attempted upon Ulysses. Which notwithstanding were of another description, containing no fishy composure, but made up of Man and Bird; the human mediety being variously placed not only above but also below. These pieces so common among us do rather derive their originall, and are indeed the very description of Dagon; which was made with humane figure above and fishy shape below, of the shape of Atergates or Derceto with the Phœnicians, in whose fishy and feminine mixture as some conceive, were implied the Moon and the Sun, or the Deity of the waters, from whence were probably occasioned the pictures of Nereides and Tritons among the Grecians."\*

\* A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in the year 1771, says of Browne's book on "Vulgar Errors," "Of all the books recommended to our youth after their academical studies, I do not know a better than this of Sir Thomas's to excite their curiosity, to put them upon thinking and inquiring, and to guard them against taking anything upon trust from opinion and authority. His language has, indeed, a little air of affectation which is apt to disgust young persons, and it would be doing a very great service to that class if some gentlemen of learning would take the pains to smooth and adapt it a little

Browne had the wisdom at a period when immense faith was attached to tradition to investigate matters for himself whenever it was possible, and the courage to declare the result whether it fell in with the statements of previous authorities or not. Thus he tells us that "the Antipathy between a Toad and a Spider—and that they poisonously destroy each other—is very famous, and Solemne Stories have been written of their combats, wherin most commonly the Victory is given unto the Spider." This definite statement of antipathy would appear to be an assertion very capable of proof or disproof, but it never seems to have occurred to the philosophers to bring the matter to test, it being so much simpler to copy throughout the centuries from each other.\* "But what we have observed herein," quoth Browne, "we cannot in reason conceale; who having in a glasse included a Toad with severall Spiders, we beheld the Spiders without resistance to sit upon his head and passe over all his body, which at last upon advantage he swallowed down, and that in a few

more to modern ears,"—a comment which we do not at all endorse, as the individual style of the old writer has a quaint charm of its own.

\* "There is scarce any tradition or popular error but stands also delivered by some good authors, who though excellent and usefull, yet being merely transcriptive, or following common relations, their accounts are not to be swallowed at large, or entertained without a prudent circumspection. In whome the *ipse dixit*, though it be no powerfull argument in any, is yet lesse authentick than in many others, because they deliver not their own experiences, but others' affirmations."—*Browne*.

hours unto the number of seven." Thus in ten minutes of practical observation collapsed a legend that had held its ground for over a thousand years.

Such results gave him full right to speak out, and he analyses the works of the ancients very freely, yet withal very justly and temperately. Thus he terms Dioscorides "an Author of good Antiquity, preferred by Galen before all that attempted the like before him: yet all he delivered therein is not to be conceived oraculous." Concerning Ælianus he tells us that he was "an elegant Author, he hath left two books which are in the hands of every one—his 'History of Animals' and his 'Varia Historia,' wherein are contained many things suspicious, not a few false, some impossible." Of Pliny himself, the great holdfast and sheet-anchor of all previous writers on natural history, he writes: "A man of great elegance and industry indefatigable, as may appear by his writings, which are never like to perish, not even with learning itself. Now what is very strange, there is scarce a popular error passant in our daies which is not either directly expressed or diductively contained in his 'Natural History,' which being in the hands of most men, hath proved a powerful occasion of their propagation." The labours of Browne should ever be held in great esteem, as he had the true scientific spirit, and, regardless of all minor considerations, sought eagerly for the truth.

In fig. 7 we have a representation of the

Oannes of the Chaldeans, the Philistine Dagon,\* the fish On, as shown on one of the slabs from the Palace of Khorsabad. While one may readily admit that the mediæval mermaid is a

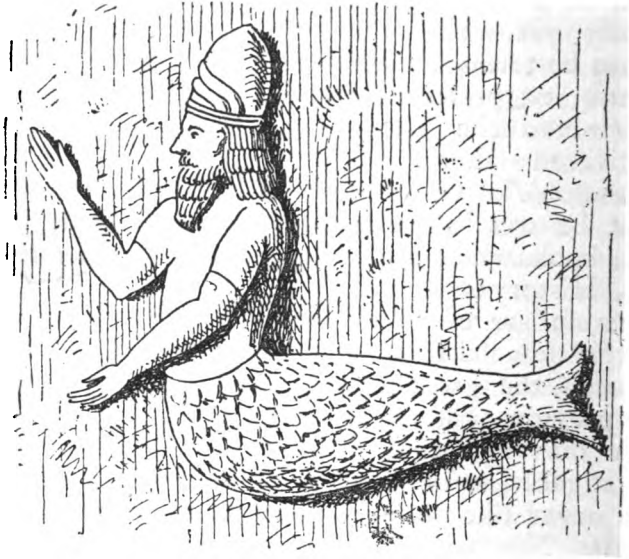


FIG. 7.

direct descendant from the tritons and sea-nymphs of classic mythology and fancy, and that these in turn may have descended from the yet older civilizations and creeds of Egypt and Assyria, we can hardly ascribe any close associa-

\* "Dagon his name, sea-monster, upward man, and downward, fish."—*Milton*.

tion between the Chaldean Oannes and the popular notion as to mermaids. The former is divine, and is necessarily but one, while the latter claim no divinity and no individuality, but are both numerous and nameless. The work of Oannes was moreover wholly beneficent; he taught men the arts of life—to construct cities, to found temples, to compile laws. He was a solar deity equivalent to Osiris and Apollo, bringing light and life to all. He was fabled to visit earth each morning, and at evening to plunge into the sea; a poetic description of the rising and setting of the sun. Hence his semi-piscine form was an expression of the belief that half his time was spent on earth and half below the waves. Hence, too, the moon-goddess, Derceto, that Browne refers to as at times manifesting herself to the eyes of men, at times plunged beneath the waves, was represented as half-woman, half-fish, and may be thus still seen on the coins of Ascalon. The kindly influence of solar and lunar deities—in other words, the beneficent influence of Nature and of the times and seasons—on the works of men is an altogether nobler idea than belief in classic syren or mediæval Lorelei, who charm but to destroy.

Fig. 8 is a curious variant from the accepted notion of a mermaid. We have extracted it from one of the maps in Munster's *Cosmography*. It is placed where in more modern charts Australia would be found, south of the islands of "Iaua" and "Porne," names which the dis-

crimination of our readers, who are at all accustomed to the transposition and substitution of letters in these old records, will no doubt readily resolve into Java and Borneo. One can easily imagine that the double tail, like the twin screws of an ironclad or ocean liner, might be of great assistance in steering, though some few millions of the lowlier inhabitants of the deep

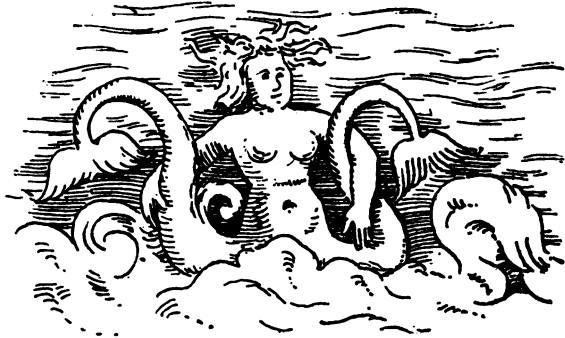


FIG. 8.

have nevertheless for ages got along very fairly without this special development.\*

We are told in mediæval story that a young man wandering along the rocky beach suddenly encountered a mermaid and seized her before she was able to reach the water. Her personal charms so worked upon his ardent temperament that he then and there proposed matrimony, and his suit was successful. Would that we could

\* A very similar figure may be seen amongst the designs of the mosaic pavements at the Roman villa discovered at Brading.

conclude in true story-book style, and declare that they lived happy ever after! After years of wedded bliss, a great longing came over her to see her own people once more, and, on the distinct understanding that the parting was to be a very short one, she embraced her husband and children and plunged into the sea and never reappeared, it being charitably assumed by those responsible for the story that the waters, like those of Lethe, washed away all remembrance of the past, and buried in oblivion the years she had spent so happily on earth.

The power that this story and the next one we propose to tell presupposes—the power of being able to change one's nature—is responsible for some of the most terrible beliefs, notably those where men and women were changed into animals, such as dragons or the wehr-wolf. In the following story, though the outcome was lamentable, the weird horror of so many of these tales is absent. Like the previous story, it deals with the tender passion, and the ardent lover and the charming damsel reappear on our page. The lady, before acceding to the wishes of her suitor, stipulated that she should have, without question, the whole of every Saturday to herself, and the request was acceded to and honourably observed for some years. At last one day, stung by the remarks of some mischief-makers, he intruded upon his wife's privacy, and found her in mermaid form disporting herself in her bath. She gave one piercing shriek, and then vanished for ever. In fig. 9

we see in the foreground the astonished husband, and to the left of the picture the meddlesome neighbour riding off, while, with the quaint *naïveté*



FIG. 9.

of Gothic art, all that intervenes between us and the chamber of mystery is removed, and there is unmistakable evidence that the fatal and final Saturday, after years of wedded bliss, has dawned. The tempting peep-hole that facilitated the tragedy will be seen by the side of the man's head, and it speaks well for the honourable feeling of the promise-giver that so easy a means of clearing up the weekly mystery was for years unused. It is difficult now to realize that such a story could ever be seriously believed, and that the possibility of some such incident might befall oneself, or occur, quite as a matter of course, in the circle of one's friends.

The terrible belief in lycanthropy, the transmutation of men into wolves, was one of the most widely spread of the weird fancies of the Middle Ages. The idea of the changing of men into various animals is a very ancient one. Herodotus tells us that the Scythians affirm that the whole nation of the Neuri change themselves once a year into wolves, and our readers will readily recall the transformation of the companions of Ulysses into swine, of Actæon into a stag, and divers other gruesome stories of like nature. Ovid, for example, in the "Metamorphoses" tells how Zeus visited Lykaon, the King of Arcadia, and how the king placed a dish of roasted human flesh before his guest to test his omniscience. The daring experiment was promptly detected, and the monarch as a punishment was changed into a wolf by the offended deity in order that hence-