

The Folk-Lore Society,

FOR COLLECTING AND PRINTING

RELICS OF POPULAR ANTIQUITIES, &c.

ESTABLISHED IN

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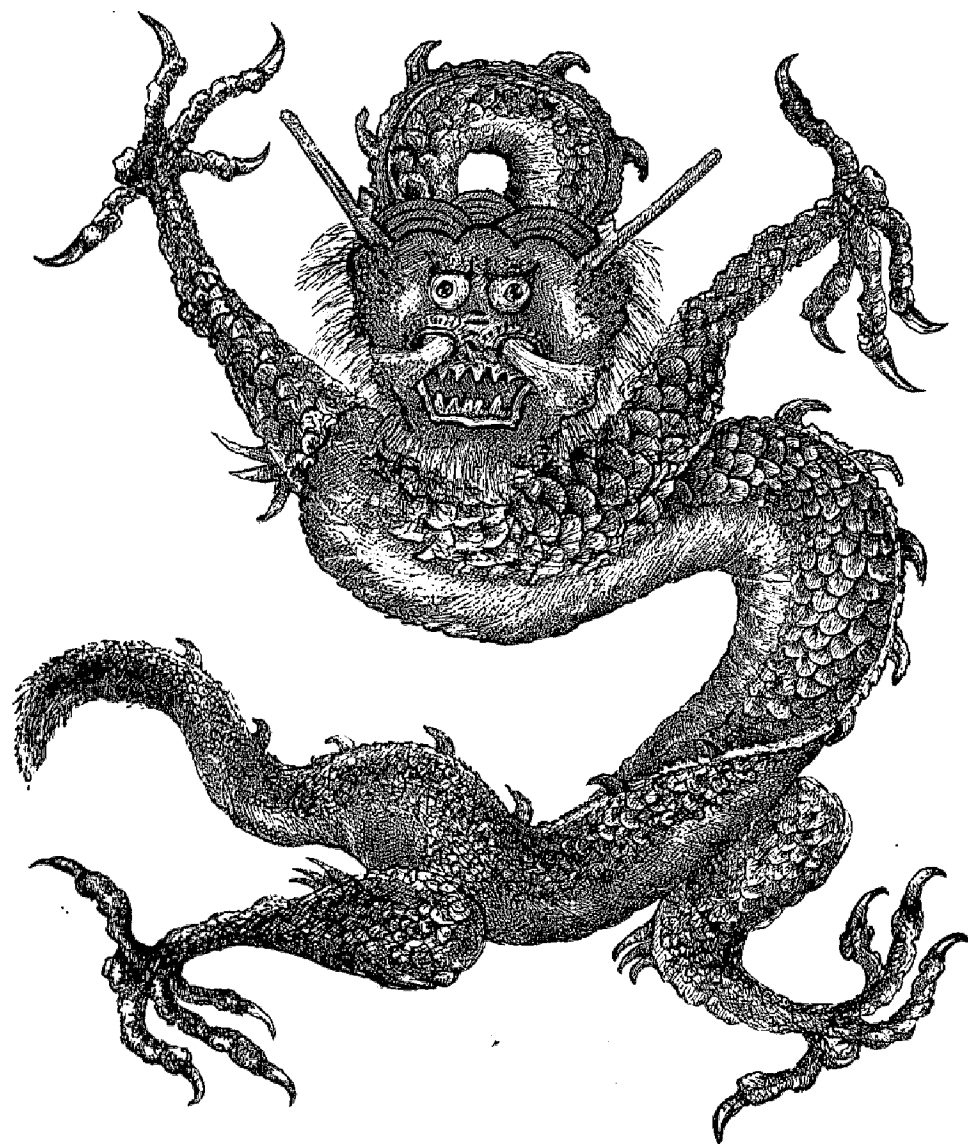


Alter et Idem.

PUBLICATIONS
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II.

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THE IMPERIAL DRAGON OF CHINA,
AS DEPICTED ON THE PORCELAIN MADE IN THE ROYAL PALACE, A.D. 1426.
SIOUEN-TE, EMPEROR.

NOTES ON THE
FOLK-LORE

OF THE
NORTHERN COUNTIES OF ENGLAND
AND THE BORDERS.

A NEW EDITION WITH MANY ADDITIONAL NOTES.

BY

WILLIAM HENDERSON,

AUTHOR OF "MY LIFE AS AN ANGLER."

"Our mothers' maids in our childhood . . . have so frayed us with bullbeggars, spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunces, sylvans, kit-with-the-candlestick (will-o'-the-wisp), tritons (kelpies), centaurs, dwarfs, giants, imps, calcars (assy-pods), conjurors, nymphs, changelings, incubus, Robin-Goodfellow (Brownies), the spoorey, the man in the oak, the hellwain, the fire-drake (dead light), the Puckle, Tom Thumb, Hobgoblin, Tom Tumbler, Boucius, and such other bug-bears, that we are afraid of our own shadows."

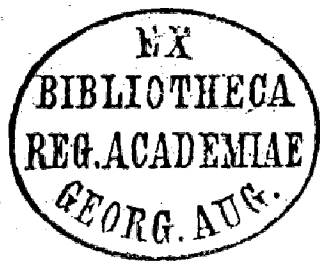
REGINALD SCOTT.

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1879.



TO
THE MOST HONOURABLE
THE MARQUESS OF LONDONDERRY,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MUCH KINDNESS
AND OF MANY PLEASANT HOURS SPENT TOGETHER,
THIS VOLUME IS, BY PERMISSION, INSCRIBED
WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF RESPECT AND ESTEEM

BY

HIS LORDSHIP'S ATTACHED FRIEND,
WILLIAM HENDERSON.

CHAPTER VIII.

WORMS OR DRAGONS.

Probable Origin of these Legends—Worm of Sockburn—The Pollard Worm or Brawn—The Lambton Worm—The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heugh—The Linton Worm—Dragons at S. Osyth's—Deerhurst—Mordeford—Chipping Norton—Denbigh—S. Leonard and the Worm.—The Helstone Dragon.—Review of the Subject.



AMONG the rich and varied Folk-Lore of the North of England and the Scottish Lowlands it is impossible not to remark how numerous and characteristic are the legends respecting dragons, or, as we locally call them, worms—a name taken from the Norse *Ormr*, a serpent or dragon. These tales are sometimes enshrined in ballads, sometimes bound up with the tenure of property, sometimes sculptured as part of church decorations; but all live yet upon the lips of the people, though of course we cannot presume to guess how long they will maintain their ground against the combined forces of railroads and collieries.

Sir Walter Scott, in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, accounts for these legends by suggesting that in bygone days, before our country was drained and cleared of wood, large serpents may have infested British woods or morasses, and taxed the prowess of British champions. I believe that Mr. Surtees held the same opinion, and Lord Lindsay, in his *Sketches of Christian Art*, writes as follows: "The dragons of early tradition, whether aquatic or terrestrial, are not perhaps wholly to be regarded as fabulous. In the case of the former, the race may be supposed to have been perpetuated till the marshes or inland seas left by the Deluge were dried up. Hence probably the legends of the Lernean hydra, &c. As respects their terrestrial brethren (among whom the serpent, which checked the army of Regulus for three

days near the River Bagradus in Numidia, will be remembered), their existence, testified as it is by the universal credence of antiquity, is not absolutely incredible. Lines of descent are constantly becoming extinct in animal genealogy."

The opinion half avowed by Sir Walter Scott and Lord Lindsay has now taken possession of other thoughtful minds. Mr. Henry Lee avows his belief in the existence of the sea-serpent, a monster as terrible as was ever confronted by champion or knight; while our great astronomer, Mr. Proctor, after long and patient research, has arrived at the conclusion that there do still linger in the ocean depths creatures of strange form and gigantic size, closely allied to the mighty Saurians of pre-Adamite times, creatures which are nocturnal in their habits and therefore seldom seen by man, but which do occasionally rise to the surface in daylight. And Mr. Waterhouse Hawkins, in a recent lecture at the London Institution on the age of dragons, boldly condemns the careless habit of treating such creatures as mere products of the human fancy in the childhood of the world, and bids us look for the prototype of the medieval dragon in the gigantic monsters of early days, with which man had to make war in his first struggles for existence on the earth which was given him to subdue.

In truth they have but gradually disappeared before him. It is well known that within the last century at the mouth of one of the Siberian rivers the remains of a colossal mammoth were hewn out of an iceberg in perfect preservation, while the Moa, if not actually surviving in the interior of New Zealand, has but recently become extinct. Captain Hope describes a strange sea-monster which he saw from the "Fly" in the Gulf of California, lying at the bottom of the ocean. It had the head and general appearance of an alligator, with a long neck and four paddles instead of legs. And in the vaults of the British Museum is preserved the arm of a gigantic cuttle-fish, from the measurement of which we may calculate that the total length of the animal must have been fifty feet.

Such strange misshapen monsters were the dread of man when yet a new inhabitant of our globe. To the Egyptian the crocodile

was his dragon, to the dweller on the coast the leviathan or sea-monster, to the Arabian in the desert the poisonous snake. But there has been a period in the history of the world when it was tenanted not only by serpents huge and terrible, but by creatures which still more closely resemble the ideal dragon as pictured by medieval painters or described by our poets and balladmongers.

This dragon had two furious wings,
 Each one upon each shoulder;
 With a sting in his tail as long as a flail,
 Which made him bolder and bolder.
 He had long claws, and in his jaws
 Four-and-forty teeth of iron,
 With a hide as tough as any buff
 Which did him round environ.¹

Such an animal was the Pterodactyle, one of those huge saurians or lizards whose fossilized bones lay hidden in the earth for centuries, till a Cuvier or a Buckland with penetrating eye and patient hand should piece them together and lay before an astonished world the perfect skeleton. The Pterodactyle as thus revealed to us is a winged reptile, with a long neck, a large head and eyes, a body covered with scales, and two feet on which to stand like a bird. Well might Dr. Buckland see in so extraordinary a creature a resemblance to Milton's fiend, who—

O'er bog, or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
 With head, hands, wings or feet pursues his way,
 And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies.

The "baby thought" of the human race having been moulded by such strange and terrible creatures, we cannot wonder that the earliest traditions of almost every nation tell of monsters of sea or land—the foes of man. The Folk-Lore of China teems with tales of dragons and serpents. In the Grecian mythology we find the many-headed Hydra destroyed by Hercules, the boar of Calydon by Meleager, the Cretan Minotaur by Theseus, as well as the sea-monster from whom Perseus saved Andromeda, the horses of Diomedes who were fed on human flesh, and the Cyclop Polyphemus blinded by Ulysses; while Norse mythology tells of the Jormangand, a sea-serpent surrounding the globe and defying the mighty Thor to do more than move it slightly,

¹ *Dragon of Wantley.*

and the Kraken, which buries its vast bulk in the muddy ooze of ocean's depths, only rising from time to time to engulf some unhappy ship beneath the waves.

That our entire country has been pervaded by a belief in such terrible creatures we learn from the names of Wormshead, Great Orme's Head, Ormesleigh, Ormeskirk, Wormigill, Wormelow, and Wormeslea, with others of a similar character scattered over the land, but in the main we must look to the North of England for legends of any remarkable vigour or beauty respecting them.

Let us begin with the Worm of Sockburn, whose story is interesting from its extreme antiquity, and its connection with an old tenure of land. The manor of Sockburn was for generations held by the presentation of a falchion to the Bishop of Durham on his first entrance into his diocese. This service is said to date from the time of Bishop Pudsey, who purchased from Richard I. for himself and his successors the title of Earl of Sadberge. And from the time of this "jolye Bishop of Durham" (as Hugh Pudsey is called in an old record) to that of Van Mildert, the last of her Palatines, each bishop, as he entered his diocese, was met on Croft Bridge, or in the middle of the River Tees, by the lord of the manor of Sockburn, who, after hailing him Count Palatine and Earl of Sadberge, presented him with the falchion, and said these words:

"My Lord Bishop, I here present you with the falchion wherewith the champion Conyers slew the worm, dragon, or fiery flying serpent, which destroyed man, woman, and child; in memory of which the king then reigning gave him the manor of Sockburn, to hold by this tenure, that upon the first entrance of every bishop into the county this falchion should be presented."

The Bishop then took the falchion into his hand, and immediately returning it, wished the lord of Sockburn health and a long enjoyment of the manor.

A fragment of verse, which I think we may safely ascribe to Mr. Surtees, the historian of the Palatinate, tells of—

Sockburn, where Conyers so trusty
 A huge serpent did dish up
 That had else ate the Bishop,
 But now his old falchion's grown rusty, grown rusty.

There is mention made of this tenure in the inquest held on the death of Sir John Conyers in A.D. 1396. The falchion also appears in painted glass in a window of Sockburn church, and together with the worm is sculptured in marble on the tomb of the ancestor of the Conyers family. In April 1826 the steward of Sir Edward Blackett, then lord of Sockburn manor, presented the falchion on Croft Bridge to Dr. Van Mildert, the last Prince-Bishop of Durham. I regret to say that the Palatinate Act has provided for the extinction of this service.

As to the Pollard Worm it appears to have been in fact a wild boar or brawn, akin to the boar or brawn of Brancepeth, which in former days was lord of the forest from the Wear to the Gaunless, till Hodge of Ferry, marking its track, dug a pitfall into which he lured it to its destruction. The following communication, which I have received through the kindness of Colonel Johnson, whose family have long been owners of a portion of the Pollard lands, gives fuller particulars of the Pollard worm or brawn than have hitherto been published.

Long long ago, when extensive forests covered the greater part of Durham and adjoining counties, and wild animals of all sorts abounded in them, a huge and very savage wild boar inhabited the woods of Bishop Auckland. The injury it did in the neighbourhood was very great. All attempts to kill or drive away the creature were in vain. Several knights and others who went out to encounter it were killed, and at last both the King and the Bishop of Durham thought it needful to come forward in the matter. The King issued a proclamation to the effect that whoever should bring the boar's head to Westminster should receive a reward, while the Bishop Count Palatine, who resided a great part of the year at Auckland Castle, and whose tenants and retainers suffered most from the beast's depredations, declared that he would give a princely guerdon to any champion who was bold and skilful enough to rid him of the monster.

A member of the Pollard family, even at that time an honourable and ancient one, armed himself and rode out to the boar's lair or den in Etherley Dene. After ascertaining its usual track,

he secured his horse in a place of safety and ascended a large beech tree which overshadowed a glade through which the monster was accustomed to pass. He shook down a quantity of ripe beechmast and patiently awaited the creature's approach. As he foresaw, the boar was arrested by the rich repast, and began at once to gorge itself with its favourite food.

After eating voraciously for a long time the boar moved away drowsily and heavily. The Pollard descended rapidly from his hiding-place and attacked the retreating animal. It turned, and though not in good plight for fighting made a fierce resistance, so that the champion did not kill it till after a desperate struggle, which must have occupied the greater part of the night, for the sun rose just as Pollard severed the boar's head from the trunk, cut out the tongue, and placed it in his wallet. Worn out with fatigue, the conqueror stretched himself at the foot of the beech-tree and fell into a deep sleep, which lasted some hours. On awaking he turned to take up the boar's head, which he was to bear to the King in proof of his victory, but to his dismay it was gone, and with it all hopes of the royal reward. So nothing remained for the Pollard but to mount his horse and ride to Auckland Castle, there to tell his tale and make the best use he could of the boar's tongue, which happily lay in his wallet, and of its carcase, which was stretched under the beech-tree. He arrived before the castle-gate at an unseasonable moment, just as the Bishop was sitting down to dinner. However, his lordship sent the champion word that he might take for his guerdon as much land as he could ride round during the hour of dinner. Weary as he was, Pollard had all his wits about him. He turned his horse's head and rode round Auckland Castle, thus making it and all it contained his own. The Bishop could not but acknowledge his claim, and gladly redeemed castle, goods, and chattels on the best terms he could. He granted the champion a freehold estate, still known as the Pollard's lands, with this condition annexed. The possessor was to meet every Bishop of Durham on his first coming to Auckland Castle, and to present him with a falchion, saying, "My Lord, I, on behalf of myself, as well as several others, possessors of Pollard's lands, do humbly present your

lordship with this falchion at your first coming here, wherewith as the tradition goeth he slew of old a mighty boar which did much harm to man and beast. And by performing this service we hold our lands." It may be added that the crest of the Pollard family is an arm holding a falchion.

But to return to the boar's head which disappeared so strangely. While our hero, worn out with the conflict, lay sleeping under the shade of the beech-tree, the lord of Mitford Castle near Morpeth rode up, being then on his way to London. He took in the state of things at a glance, and, knowing of the reward the King had promised, he stealthily dismounted from his horse, took up the head, slung it at his saddlebow, remounted, and resumed his journey with all speed. On arriving in London he went straight to the royal palace, showed the head, and obtained the reward.

It is added that Pollard too went to London afterwards, and urged his claims, pleading that the head Mitford had brought was without a tongue, but to no purpose.

The Lambton Worm, partly from the romantic character of its history, partly because it relates to a family of note in the county, seems to have taken deep hold of the popular mind in Durham, and it is peculiarly fortunate in a chronicler. About thirty years ago, Sir Cuthbert Sharpe, the friend of Mr. Surtees, and his assistant in the History of the Palatinate, collected every particular respecting this Worm from old residents in the neighbourhood of Lambton, and placed the whole in the *Bishoprick Garland*, a collection of legends, songs, ballads, &c., relating to the county of Durham. As only one hundred and fifty copies of this little work were printed, and it is now extremely scarce, free use has been made of it in the following account of the Worm of Lambton:—

The park and manor-house of Lambton, belonging to a family of the same name, lie on the banks of the Wear, to the north of Lumley. The family is a very ancient one, much older, it is believed, than the twelfth century, to which date its pedigree extends. The old castle was dismantled in 1797, when a site was adopted for the present mansion on the north bank of the swiftly-flowing Wear, in a situation of exceeding beauty. The park

also contains the ruins of a chapel, called Brugeford or Bridgeford, close to one of the bridges which span the Wear.

Long, long ago, some say about the fourteenth century, the young heir of Lambton led a careless profane life, regardless alike of his duties to God and man, and in particular neglecting to attend mass, that he might spend his Sunday mornings in fishing. One Sunday, while thus engaged, having cast his line into the Wear many times without success, he vented his disappointment in curses loud and deep, to the great scandal of the servants and tenantry as they passed by to the chapel at Brugeford.

Soon afterwards he felt something tugging at his line, and trusting he had at last secured a fine fish, he exerted all his skill and strength to bring his prey to land. But what were his horror and dismay on finding that, instead of a fish, he had only caught a worm of most unsightly appearance! He hastily tore the thing from his hook, and flung it into a well close by, which is still known by the name of the Worm Well.

The young heir had scarcely thrown his line again into the stream when a stranger of venerable appearance, passing by, asked him what sport he had met with. To which he replied, "Why, truly, I think I have caught the devil himself. Look in and judge." The stranger looked, and remarked that he had never seen the like of it before; that it resembled an eel, only it had nine holes on each side of its mouth; and, finally, that he thought it boded no good.

The worm remained unheeded in the well till it outgrew so confined a dwelling-place. It then emerged, and betook itself by day to the river, where it lay coiled round a rock in the middle of the stream, and by night to a neighbouring hill, round whose base it would twine itself; while it continued to grow so fast, that it soon could encircle the hill three times. This eminence is still called the Worm Hill. It is oval in shape, on the north side of the Wear, and about a mile and a half from old Lambton Hall.

The monster now became the terror of the whole country side. It sucked the cows' milk, worried the cattle, devoured the lambs,

and committed every sort of depredation on the helpless peasantry. Having laid waste the district on the north side of the river it crossed the stream and approached Lambton Hall, where the old lord was living alone and desolate. His son had repented of his evil life, and had gone to the wars in a distant country. Some authorities tell us he had embarked as a crusader for the Holy Land.

On hearing of their enemy's approach, the terrified household assembled in council. Much was said, but to little purpose, till the steward, a man of age and experience, advised that the large trough which stood in the courtyard should immediately be filled with milk. This was done without delay; the monster approached, drank the milk, and, without doing further harm, returned across the Wear to wrap his giant form around his favourite hill. The next day he was seen recrossing the river; the trough was hastily filled again, and with the same results. It was found that the milk of "nine kye" was needed to fill the trough; and if this quantity was not placed there every day, regularly and in full measure, the worm would break out into a violent rage, lashing its tail round the trees in the park, and tearing them up by the roots.

The Lambton Worm was now, in fact, the terror of the North Country. It had not been left altogether unopposed. Many a gallant knight had come out to fight with the monster, but all to no purpose; for it possessed the marvellous power of reuniting itself after being cut asunder, and thus was more than a match for the chivalry of the North. So, after many conflicts, and much loss of life and limb, the creature was left in possession of its favourite hill.

After seven long years, however, the heir of Lambton returned home, a sadder and a wiser man: returned to find the broad lands of his ancestors waste and desolate, his people oppressed and wellnigh exterminated, his father sinking into the grave overwhelmed with care and anxiety. He took no rest, we are told, till he had crossed the river and surveyed the Worm as it lay coiled round the foot of the hill; then, hearing how its former opponents had failed, he took counsel in the matter from a sybil or wise woman.

At first the sybil did nothing but upbraid him for having brought this scourge upon his house and neighbourhood; but when she perceived that he was indeed penitent, and desirous at any cost to remove the evil he had caused, she gave him her advice and instructions. He was to get his best suit of mail studded thickly with spear-heads, to put it on, and thus armed to take his stand on the rock in the middle of the river, there to meet his enemy, trusting the issue to Providence and his good sword. But she charged him before going to the encounter to take a vow that, if successful, he would slay the first living thing that met him on his way homewards. Should he fail to fulfil this vow, she warned him that for nine generations no lord of Lambton would die in his bed.

The heir, now a belted knight, made the vow in Brugeford chapel; he studded his armour with the sharpest spear-heads, and unsheathing his trusty sword took his stand on the rock in the middle of the Wear. At the accustomed hour the Worm uncoiled its "snaky twine," and wound its way towards the hall, crossing the river close by the rock on which the knight was standing eager for the combat. He struck a violent blow upon the monster's head as it passed, on which the creature, "irritated and vexed," though apparently not injured, flung its tail round him, as if to strangle him in its coils.

In the words of a local poet :

The worm shot down the middle stream
 Like a flash of living light,
 And the waters kindled round his path
 In rainbow colours bright.
 But when he saw the armed knight
 He gathered all his pride,
 And coiled in many a radiant spire
 Rode buoyant o'er the tide.
 When he darted at length his dragon strength
 An earthquake shook the rock,
 And the fireflakes bright fell round the knight
 As unmoved he met the shock.
 Though his heart was stout it quailed no doubt,
 His very life-blood ran cold,
 As round and round the wild Worm wound
 In many a grappling fold.

Now was seen the value of the sybil's advice. The closer the Worm wrapped him in its folds the more deadly were its self-inflicted wounds, till at last the river ran crimson with its gore. Its strength thus diminished, the knight was able at last with his good sword to cut the serpent in two; the severed part was immediately borne away by the swiftness of the current, and the Worm, unable to reunite itself, was utterly destroyed.

During this long and desperate conflict the household of Lambton had shut themselves within-doors to pray for their young lord, he having promised that when it was over he would, if conqueror, blow a blast on his bugle. This would assure his father of his safety, and warn them to let loose the favourite hound, which they had destined as the sacrifice on the occasion, according to the sybil's requirements and the young lord's vow. When, however, the bugle-notes were heard within the hall, the old man forgot everything but his son's safety, and rushing out of doors, ran to meet the hero and embrace him.

The heir of Lambton was thunderstruck; what could he do? It was impossible to lift his hand against his father; yet how else to fulfil his vow? In his perplexity he blew another blast; the hound was let loose, it bounded to its master; the sword, yet reeking with the monster's gore, was plunged into its heart; but all in vain. The vow was broken, the sybil's prediction fulfilled, and the curse lay upon the house of Lambton for nine generations.

The exact date of the story is of course uncertain. Sir Cuthbert Sharpe appends to it the following entry from an old manuscript pedigree, lately in the possession of the family of Middleton, of Offerton: "John Lambton, that slewe ye worme, was knight of Rhodes and lord of Lambton, after ye dethe of fower brothers—'sans eschew malle.'" Now nine ascending generations, from a certain Henry Lambton, Esq. M.P. would exactly reach to Sir John Lambton, knight of Rhodes; and it was to that Henry Lambton that the old people of the neighbourhood used to look with great curiosity, marvelling whether the curse would "hold good to the end." He died in his carriage,

crossing the new bridge of Lambton, on the 26th of June, 1761;¹ and popular tradition is clear and unanimous in maintaining that, during the period of the curse, no lord of Lambton ever died in his bed. I have frequently heard my mother relate how her mother used to speak of the deep and wide-spreading anxiety which prevailed during the latter years of Henry Lambton, and when tidings reached Durham of his death and the fulfilment of the prophecy the universal feeling was one of deep awe, not unmingled with a certain satisfaction in the final accomplishment of what had been looked forward to so long and so earnestly. The violent deaths of some of this fated family are recorded in history. Sir William Lambton, a colonel of a regiment of foot in the service of Charles I. was slain at Marston Moor; and his son William, as gallant a Royalist as his father, received his death-wound at Wakefield, at the head of a troop of dragoons, A.D. 1643. Surely such deaths as these show how a curse may pass into a blessing!

It may be added that two stone figures of some antiquity and tolerable workmanship existed lately at Lambton Castle. One of these was apparently an effigy of our hero—studded armour, sword, and vanquished monster, all as described in the legend, except that the Worm is endowed with ears, legs, and even a pair of wings. The other figure was a female one, and marked by no very characteristic features. It might, however, have been meant for the sybil. The trough from which the Worm took its daily tribute of milk is still to be seen at Lambton Hall; and Mr. Surtees mentions that in his young days he saw there a piece of some tough substance, resembling bull's hide, which was shown him as part of the Worm's skin.

From the green banks of the Wear we must pass to the stern and rock-bound coast of Northumberland if we would make acquaintance with the Laidley (*i. e.* loathly, or loathsome) Worm of Spindleston Heugh. Its history is exceedingly popular on the

¹ The parish registers record that Henry Lambton was baptized at Bishops Wearmouth, November 9, 1697, obiit cæl. et intest. June 26, 1761, and was buried on July 4 of the same year.

Borders, as Sir Walter Scott remarks in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, though he refrains from transcribing it on account of its resemblance to "Kempion." The legend was put into verse—very unequal, however, in character—by a former vicar of Norham.

It opens with a parting between a king and his daughter. He goes out to win a second bride, and leaves his child, the Lady Margaret, in charge of Bamborough Castle. We see her, during her father's absence, arranging everything against his return, tripping out and tripping in, with the keys hanging over her left shoulder. At last the day arrives; the chieftains of the Border are all assembled to receive the king and queen. They come; the Lady Margaret welcomes them to hall and bower, and then, turning sweetly to her stepmother, reminds her that everything now is hers. One of the chieftains, struck by the young girl's beauty and simplicity, praises her loudly in the queen's hearing, as

Excelling all of woman kind
In beauty and in worth.

The jealous queen mutters, "You might have excepted me;" and from that hour Margaret's fate was sealed. The next morning the maiden was standing at her bower-door, laughing for joy of heart; but before nightfall her stepdame had witched her to a loathsome Worm, so to abide till her brother, the Childe of Wynde, should come to her rescue from beyond seas. The cave is still shown at Spindleston Heugh where the Worm hid itself by day; during the night it would wander on the coast. We do not hear of any depredations it committed beyond the exaction of a tribute of milk (that favourite beverage of northern worms!); but so poisonous was the creature that for seven long miles in every direction the country was laid waste—no green thing would grow.

At last, word went over the sea to the Childe of Wynde, that his native land was desolated by a Laidley Worm on Spindleston Heugh; and, fearing lest any harm should befall his sister, he summoned his merry men, thirty-and-three in number:

They built a ship without delay,
 With masts of the rowan-tree,
 With fluttering sails of silk so fine,
 And set her on the sea.

They went on board, the wind with speed
 Blew them along the deep;
 At length they spied a huge square tower
 On a rock so high and steep.

The sailors recognised the Northumbrian coast and King Ida's Castle, and made towards shore.

Meanwhile, the queen looked out of her bower-window, and spying the gallant ship with its silken sails, sent out her evil companions, the "witch wives," to sink it in the waters; but they returned baffled and sullen, murmuring that there must be rowan-wood about the ship, for all their spells were powerless. Next she dispatched a boat with armed men to withstand the landing of the vessel; but the gallant Childe speedily put them to the rout. Lastly, it would seem that the Worm itself withstood its deliverer, for we are told that

The Worme lept up, the Worme lept down,
 She plaited round the stone,
 And aye, as the ship came close to land,
 She banged it off again.

However, the Childe of Wynde steered the ship out of her reach, ran ashore on the sands of Budle, a small village near Bamborough, and, drawing his sword, went boldly towards the monster, as if to do battle at once. But the creature submitted, exclaiming,—

"O quit thy sword, and bend thy bow,
 And give me kisses three;
 For though I be a poisonous Worme,
 No hurt I'll do to thee.

O quit thy sword, and bend thy bow,
 And give me kisses three;
 If I'm not won ere set of sun,
 Won shall I never be."

He quitted his sword, and bent his bow,
 He gave her kisses three;
 She crept into her hole a Worme,
 But out stept a ladye.

Our hero folded his recovered sister in his mantle, and bore her with him to Bamborough Castle, where he found his father inconsolable for her loss, though, through the queen's witcheries, he had tamely submitted to it. However, the queen's power was over now, and the Childe pronounced her unalterable doom. Changed into a toad, she was to wander till doomsday round Bamborough Castle, and the fair maidens of that neighbourhood believe that she still vents her malice against them by spitting venom at them.

Crossing the Border into Roxburghshire, we approach the haunts of the Worme of Linton, and very romantic they are. There is the mountain-stream of the Cale, bursting in brightness from the Cheviot Hills, and hurrying into the plain below, where it pauses ere it wends its way to join the Tweed. There is the low irregular mound, marking where stood the tower of Linton, the stronghold of the Somervilles; there is the old village church, standing on its remarkable knoll of sand; there are the stately woods of Clifton, and, above all, the lofty heights of Cheviot crowning the distance.

Such is the fair scene which tradition avers was once laid waste by a fierce and voracious monster. His den, still named the "Worm's Hole," lay in a hollow to the east of the hill of Linton; and small need had he to leave it, for from this retreat he could with his sweeping and venomous breath draw the neighbouring flocks and herds within reach of his fangs. Still he did occasionally emerge and coil himself round an eminence of some height, at no great distance, still bearing the name of Wormington or Wormistonne. Liberal guerdons were offered to any champion who would rid the country of such a scourge, but in vain—such was the dread inspired by the monster's poisonous breath. Not only were the neighbouring villagers beside themselves with terror, but the inhabitants of Jedburgh, full ten miles off, were struck with such a panic that they were ready to desert their town.

At last, however, the laird of Lariston, a man of reckless bravery, came forward to the rescue of this distressed district; and, as the Linton cottagers testify to this day, having once

failed in an attack with ordinary weapons, he resorted to the expedient of thrusting down its throat a peat dipped in scalding pitch and fixed on his lance. The device proved perfectly successful. The aromatic quality of the burning pitch, while it suffocated and choked the monster, preserved the champion from the effects of its poison-laden breath. While dying, the worm is said to have contracted its folds with such violent muscular energy that the sides of Wormington Hill are still marked with their spiral impressions. In requital of his service, the laird of Lariston received the gift of extensive lands in the neighbourhood.

The Somerville family (for nearly four hundred years lords of Linton) claim the merit of this exploit for the John Somerville who received the barony of Linton in 1174, and built its tower. They maintain that it was conferred on him by William the Lion as a reward for slaying the Worm, and they bear a dragon for their crest in memorial of it. Unfortunately, however, in their hands the Worm loses much of its grandeur and importance. The monster encircling the hillock with its snaky coils becomes "in length three Scots' yards, and somewhat bigger than an ordinary man's leg, with a head more proportionable to its length than greatness, in form and colour like to our common muir-edders." In this disparaging way at least is the Linton Worm described by the author of *The Memoirs of the Somervilles*, A.D. 1680.

The sculptured effigy of the monster, which may still be seen with the champion who slew it, at the south-western extremity of Linton church, differs from both accounts. A stone, evidently of great antiquity, is there built into the wall. It is covered with sculpture in low relief, and bears figures which, though defaced by time, can yet be made out pretty clearly. A knight on horseback, clad in a tunic or hauberk, with a round helmet, urges his horse against two large animals, the foreparts of which only are visible, and plunges his lance into the throat of one. Behind him is the outline of another creature, apparently of a lamb. The heads of the monsters are strong and powerful, but more like those of quadrupeds than of serpents. It is per-

plexing also to see two of them, but not the less does popular tradition connect the representation with the Linton Worm, and aver that the inscription below it, now quite defaced, ran thus:—

The wode laird of Larristone
Slew the Worme of Wormestone,
And wan a' Linton parochine.

It should be added, that, though the present church appears to have been rebuilt at no very distant date, it stands on the site of the former one, and is formed from its materials; this sculptured stone having stood, it is said, above the door of the old church. Whether it really represents some doughty deed by which the first Somerville won the favour of William the Lion, or visibly embodies the great conflict between Christianity and Paganism, has been much disputed by antiquaries. The figure, resembling a lamb behind the victorious knight, is certainly suggestive of a mythical interpretation, and reminds us of the banner of St. Eric, so treasured by the ancient Swedes, and stored in the cathedral at Upsala, which bore on one side, in gold embroidery, a lamb and a dragon.

There is another legend connected with Linton, of exceeding interest. It is sometimes interwoven with that of the Worm, and, though I am informed that in its more correct form it stands alone, I may perhaps be pardoned for a little discursiveness if I pause to relate it. The church is built on a little knoll of fine compact sand, without any admixture of stone, or even pebbles, and widely different from the soil of the neighbouring heights, The sand has nowhere hardened into stone, yet the particles are so coherent, that the sides of newly-opened graves appear smooth as a wall, and this to the depth of fifteen feet. This singular phenomenon is thus accounted for on the spot.

Many ages ago a young man killed a priest in this place, and was condemned to suffer death for murder and sacrilege. His doom seemed inevitable, but powerful intercession was made for him, especially by his two sisters, who were fondly attached to their brother. At last his life was granted him, on condition that the sisters should sift as much sand as would form a mound

on which to build a church. The maidens joyfully undertook the task, and their patience did not fail. They completed it, and the church was built, though it is added that one of the sisters died immediately after her brother's liberation, either from the effects of past fatigue or overpowering joy. Such is the version of the legend, deemed the correct one at Linton. The villagers point to the sandy knoll in confirmation of its truth, and show a hollow place a short distance to the westward as that from which the sand was taken.

The legends of serpents and dragons rife in other parts of England are, on the whole, but meagre when compared with these Northern tales. A few are enumerated by a contributor to *The Folk-Lore Record* of 1878. At St. Osythes, in Essex, appeared, A.D. 1170, a dragon of marvellous bigness, which, by moving, set fire to houses. At Deerhurst, near Tewkesbury, a serpent of prodigious size was once a great grievance to the place, poisoning the inhabitants, and devouring their cattle, till the king proclaimed that any one who destroyed the serpent should receive an estate in the parish belonging to the crown. One John Smith placed a quantity of milk near the creature's lair, which it drank and then lay down to sleep. Smith cut off its head with an axe and received the estate, which still continued in his family when Sir Robert Atkyns wrote this account. The axe also was carefully preserved. At Mordiford, in Herefordshire, the tradition yet survives of a furious combat between a dragon and a condemned malefactor, who was promised pardon on the condition of his destroying his antagonist. He did kill it, but fell a victim to the poison of its breath. The contest is said to have taken place in the river Lug, and the dragon is represented in a painting in Mordiford church as a winged serpent, about twelve feet long, with a large head and open mouth. Near Chipping Norton, in Oxfordshire, A.D. 1349, was a serpent with two heads, faces like women, and great wings after the manner of a bat.

In Wright's *History of Ludlow* we meet with a legend relating to the village of Bromfield, near that town, which has been preserved by Thomas of Walsingham, a historian of the fourteenth

century: "In the year 1344 a certain Saracen physician came to Earl Warren to ask permission to kill a serpent or dragon which had its den at Bromfield, and was committing great ravages in the Earl's lands on the borders of Wales. The Earl consented, and the dragon was overcome by the incantations of the Arab; but certain words which he had dropped led to the belief that large treasure lay hid in the dragon's den. Some men of Herefordshire, hearing of this, went by night, at the instigation of a Lombard, named Peter Picard, to dig for the gold; and they had just reached it when the retainers of the Earl Warren, having discovered what was going on, fell suddenly upon them, and threw them into prison. The treasure, which the Earl took possession of, was very great."¹

A town in Wales is said to have derived its present name from a dragon or winged serpent. Long ago such a creature haunted the precincts of the castle of Caledfryn-yn-Rhos, now called Denbigh Castle, attacking man and beast till everyone was scared from approaching its den, and the town was left desolate. At last a member of the noble family of Salisbury, of Lleweni, known among his countrymen as Sir John of the Thumbs, because he had eight fingers and two thumbs on each hand, volunteered to attack the monstrous reptile. A desperate conflict ensued, and Sir John succeeded at last in thrusting his sword deep under the dragon's wing, on which, with a horrible yell, it expired. Sir John cut off its head and bore it in triumph to the spot where his friends and the townspeople were awaiting his return. When he came in sight of them he shouted out "Dim Bych," "no more dragon," words which have passed into the name of the place. This curious narration was translated from the Welsh by Mr. James Jones.

One legend, however, from the South of England vies in poetic beauty with those of the North. It is that of St. Leonard and the Dragon, which I subjoin as it was related to my fellow-worker in the very forest with which the tale is connected. Leonard, first a courtier of the Frank-king Clovis, afterwards a disciple of S. Remigius and a hermit saint, dwelt at one time in

¹ Page 28.

the beautiful forest in Sussex which bears his name, as afterwards in a wood near Limoges, in France. At first he found nothing to molest him there except the nightingales, whose constant singing disturbed him when he said his offices. He simply bade them to depart, and they went, never to return. While year by year every other copse and thicket in the county resound through the days and nights of spring with the song of countless nightingales, St. Leonard's Forest continues silent to the present time.

But the saint soon became aware that the forest contained another denizen, a dragon of great strength and malignity, the dread of all the villages around. Fierce encounters soon took place between the two, the saint, though often sorely wounded, driving his antagonist further and further into the inmost recesses of the forest, till at last the creature disappeared in the under-wood and was thought to be slain. The scenes of these successive combats are revealed afresh every year, when beds of fragrant lilies of the valley spring up wherever the earth was sprinkled by the blood of the warrior saint.

In later days, however, the monster would seem to have reappeared. We read in an account written A.D. 1614,¹ that such a serpent "was oft-times seen at a place called Faygate, and it hath been seen within a mile of Horsham, a wonder, no doubt most terrible and noisome to the inhabitants thereof. It was reported to be nine feet in length, with a quantity of thickness about the midst, and somewhat smaller at both ends. It rid away as fast as a man could run, was very proud of countenance, and had on either side of him two great bunches as big as a large football, which some thought would soon grow to be wings, but God, I hope, will defend the poor people in the neighbourhood that he shall be destroyed before he grow so fledged. One man did set out with two mastiff dogs to chase it, as yet not knowing the great danger of it, but his dogs were both killed,

¹ The full title of this account is "*True and Wonderful.—A Discourse relating a strange and monstrous Serpent or Dragon, lately discovered and yet living to the great annoyance and divers slaughters, both men and cattell, by his strong and violent poyson. In Sussex, two miles from Horsham, in a woode called St. Leonard's Forrest, and thirty miles from London, this present month of August, 1614. Printed at London by John Trundle 1614.*" Quoted from Mrs. Latham's "*West Sussex Superstitions,*"—*Folk-Lore Record*, vol.

and he himself was glad to return with haste to preserve his own life."

The memory of St. Leonard's antagonist has never died out in Sussex. Stories of monstrous serpents have been repeated there from that day to this. A few years back "an oudacious large one" is said to have appeared in the west of that county. Its lair was near a bye-path which it suffered nobody to traverse, but would rush out and drive back any traveller with a terrible hissing, and what Queen Elizabeth would have called "an ill smell."

I will only add that the late Dr. Mantell, the geologist, used to quote the legend of St. Leonard's dragon as one possibly to be traced to the saurians, whose fossil remains are still to be found abundantly in the neighbouring beds of Tilgate Forest.

Nor are the legends connected with Helston, a remote Cornish town between the Lizard and Land's End, without a certain interest. I give them as they are kindly communicated to me by Miss E. Phillips, a lady who formerly resided in that place.

Many years ago Helston was threatened with destruction by a fiery dragon who appeared in the sky and hovered for some days over the place, bearing in his claws a red-hot ball. The terrified inhabitants escaped to the neighbouring villages, leaving behind them, sad to say, the old and weak to perish. At last, however, the dragon passed over Helston and dropped the fiery ball upon the downs more than half a mile away, at a spot still pointed out. Thus the town was saved, and this deliverance is commemorated every year on the 8th of May by a festivity called the Flora Day. Flowers are cultivated diligently for this fête, the maidens of Helston being specially adorned with lilies of the valley, while every youth should wear a tulip in his hat.

All assemble in the market-house, the young men bringing bouquets of flowers for their partners, and on the band striking up the Flora, or Furry tune, a lively and rather pretty melody, the dance begins. Down the street, through the public buildings, and all the principal shops and dwelling-houses, the dancers take their way, the master and mistress standing at the entrance of many a granite house to receive them and speed them onwards

through the back door and out into the street again. One party of dancers was sent off to the moor soon after dawn to begin the dance from the very spot on which the dragon had cast down the dread instrument of destruction, but all meet at last in the assembly rooms, where they go through a country dance to the same gay Flora tune. Nothing can be more picturesque than the whole scene.

The ball flung down by the dragon is shown in the yard of the principal hotel; but another tale is sometimes told respecting it, which runs as follows:—There was once a fearful contest for the possession of the town between St. Michael, the patron saint of its church, and the arch fiend. Satan was vanquished, and as he suddenly fled away he hurled at the archangel this great stone, from whence the town derived its name, once spelt Hellestone. The hotel, which is called the Angel, claims to stand on the site of the conflict.

The whole subject is one of very great interest. These stories of hero and dragon—victorious hero and defeated dragon—are clearly but the reflex, with a little local colouring, of earlier tales of the same character, which have been rife in the world from very remote times. Such tales come before us in widely separated countries, among people of different races, interwoven with almost every form of religion. They are the inheritance of every branch of the human family, and the question recurs again and again to the thoughtful mind, how are we to account for the firm hold they possess over the heart of man.

It is considered by some authors that these legends are figurative; that they grow up around the memory of such monsters of cruelty as Attila or the infamous Baron de Retz, who are accordingly handed down to posterity with the outward lineaments of dragons and such like monsters. This theory is however plainly insufficient to cover the whole question, though it may be that in certain localities connected with such tyrants the circumstances of their barbarities may have been introduced into the old mythical stories. Indeed it is well known that in the ballad of the Dragon of Wantley we find portrayed in a covert manner the tyrannical acts of a certain Yorkshire squire, who, in order to

make a chase for deer, pulled down a whole village near Sheffield and utterly ruined many of its inhabitants. Other writers see in the dragon only the huge serpent, the gigantic saurian, or other enormous creature such as formerly disputed with man the mastery of the world, only by degrees disappearing before him. To others again all is pure allegory. In every tale of champion and dragon they simply see "the ceaseless universal strife" between good and evil, once shown in all its intensity upon Mount Calvary, and since repeated wherever the good soldiers of the Cross have in their turn fought the same fight and won the same victory.

For myself I would only ask whether the last two points of view may not be held together. Believing as I do that the ancient dragon myth embodies and has helped to uphold in the world a belief in truth victorious over error, holiness triumphant over sin, it yet does appear to me perfectly clear that the outward form and presentment of evil as thus set before us is borrowed from those monstrous forms of animal life which were more familiar to our ancestors than happily they are to their descendants.

That the dragon has been from the beginning a world-wide type and embodiment of the Spirit of Evil is clear, and this even when it was the object of direct worship, which it soon became. And in this manner:—the children of Eve, smarting under the curse which her disobedience entailed upon them, feared the power that had over-mastered her, and went on to offer prayers and sacrifices to a being they dreaded though they could not love. Thus a religion of terror sprang up, and "that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan," has since received the adoration of countless votaries in the very form wherein he tempted their first mother. He was thus worshipped as the evil Deity of the ancient Egyptians and Persians, and is figured under the same form in the hieroglyphics of Mexico and of China. So proud, indeed, are the Chinese to this day of their dreadful king, that they call their country "the land of the Dragon Throne."

Alongside, however, of the practice of dragon-worship, we do

meet on the stream of history with tales of maiden innocence self-offered for the redemption of parents, friends, or country, and of heroic courage assailing the monster and setting the devoted one free. In China, the fair damsel, Ki, was herself both victim and champion, while in such beautiful Greek myths as that of Perseus and Andromeda the grand Christian legend of St. George and the Dragon is more perfectly foreshadowed—a grand legend, indeed, whether we take the hero to represent Christianity triumphant over Paganism, or Holiness over Sin; nor can we, at the present day, fully estimate the vast power it exercised for good over half-instructed people when it met their eyes in painting or sculpture, or stirred their spirits when sung or recited in ballads. The dullest mind and hardest heart could not fail to learn from it something of the hatefulness of evil, the beauty of self-sacrifice, and the all-conquering might of truth.

Whether the legend was founded on a true history, or was called into existence to meet the cravings of a recently Christianized world, may be open to doubt, but certain it is, that, presented as was its subject in so attractive a form, it exactly met the wants of men who in those days of ignorance needed some material embodiment which should forcibly impress upon them the great contest between good and evil.

And when this was done, so vigorously yet with so much beauty, we cannot be surprised at the influence it has exercised. It is no wonder that St. George has been adopted as the patron saint of Sicily, Arragon, Valencia, Genoa, Malta, and Barcelona, as well as of our own country, or that orders of knighthood should have been instituted in his honour and bearing his name in Venice, Spain, Austria, Genoa, Rome, Bavaria, Russia, Hanover, and, above all, in England, whose "ancient word of courage" has long been "fair St. George."