

THE  
RELIQUARY,

QUARTERLY

ARCHÆOLOGICAL JOURNAL AND REVIEW.

A DEPOSITORY FOR PRECIOUS RELICS—LEGENDARY,  
BIOGRAPHICAL, AND HISTORICAL,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE

HABITS, CUSTOMS, AND PURSUITS, OF OUR FOREFATHERS.

EDITED BY THE

REV. J. CHARLES COX, LL.D., F.S.A.,

*Rector of Barton-le-Street,*

*Author of "Churches of Derbyshire," "How to Write the History of a Parish," "Annals of All Saints', Derby," "Capitular Muniments of Lichfield," etc., etc.*

---

VOL. I. (NEW SERIES.) JAN. TO OCT., 1887.

---

LONDON:  
BEMROSE AND SONS, 23, OLD BAILEY;  
AND DERBY.

—  
1888.

## About this Text

### *The Norman Doorways of Yorkshire*

John Romilly Allen

A discussion of the animal themes, many bestiary related, on the sculptures decorating church doorways in Yorkshire, England. With drawings of some of the sculptures, identification of the animal figures, and explanations of how they relate to the <#~P869 Physiologus~> and bestiaries.

This edition is from *The Reliquary*, Volume 1, 1888, page 167-175.

This digital text is available from the [Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages](http://www.bestiary.ca/etexts/etext116034.htm) web site, in the Digital Text library:

<https://bestiary.ca/etexts/etext116034.htm>

The original is available at:

<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb11576525?page=245>

## Copyright

The print edition of this text was published in London in 1888; the digital edition was assembled in 2025 by David Badke. The original print edition is believed to be in the public domain. This edition is released under a Creative Commons license.



## The Norman Doorways of Yorkshire.

BY J. ROMILLY ALLEN, F.S.A. (SCOT.)

### ALNE.

THE village of Alne is situated twelve miles north-west of York, and is a mile distant from Alne station on the Great Northern Railway. The church, although sadly damaged by injudicious repairs executed before the time of the Gothic revival, still retains some of its ancient features, those belonging to the Norman period being the south doorways of the nave and chancel, and the font. The lintel of the doorway of the chancel has figure sculpture upon it, but it is so much weathered that the subject can hardly be made out. The font is bowl shaped, and ornamented with narrow bands of foliage and plaitwork.

The south doorway of the nave has a semi-circular arch, consisting of two orders of mouldings, on the faces of which are a series of medallions, enclosing figures of animals. The abacus mouldings and the capitals of the columns of the jambs are decorated with sculptured foliage. When the church was repaired, this doorway appears to have been partially rebuilt, and an attempt made to restore some of the stones, with very indifferent success. The sculpture on the new stones that have been inserted can hardly be said to be copied from the old work, as the figures have been replaced by debased ornament.

The inner arch moulding is composed of fifteen stones, each of which has a circular medallion upon it, ornamented with a row of pellets, and enclosing the following subjects:—

1. The Agnus Dei.
- 2 and 3. Subjects doubtful.

4. Beast holding branch in its mouth.
5. Beast with floriated tail.
6. Beast.
7. Scorpio (?)
- 8 and 9. Modern restorations.
- 10 and 11. Defaced.
12. Beast.
13. Bird with wings spread.
14. Man with uplifted axe, killing pig.
15. Beast with goat's head and serpent's tail, like representations of Capricornus on the Zodiac.

The first point to be noticed here is the association of the *Agnus Dei* with figures of beasts and birds, a peculiarity that occurs in many other places.\* In describing the font at Tissington, in Derbyshire, in a previous number of the *Reliquary*, this apparent incongruity was explained by showing that the representations of animals, which have been hitherto looked upon as mere grotesques, are taken from the moralised bestiaries of the middle ages, and symbolise the most vital doctrines of Christianity.

In medieval literature, not only were spiritual allegories attached to the descriptions of animals in books on natural history, but many other branches of science were pressed into the service of the Church for the purpose of religious instruction. Thus Philippe de Thaun, the author of the Anglo Norman metrical version of the bestiary, has written an account of the Zodiac, showing how each of the different signs may be interpreted spiritually.† Looked at from a modern scientific point of view, much of this kind of symbolism seems to be very childish, but that it was both seriously believed in and well suited to the popular taste of the day is amply proved by the number of books on the subject which are still in existence, dating from the 8th century onwards.

The signs of the Zodiac were considered to be appropriate for use in the decoration of ecclesiastical buildings, not only on account of the moralisations associated with them by the medieval writers, but also because they occur as illustrations in the Church calendars to mark the divisions of the year. Examples of Saxon and later MS. calendars are to be seen in the British Museum.‡

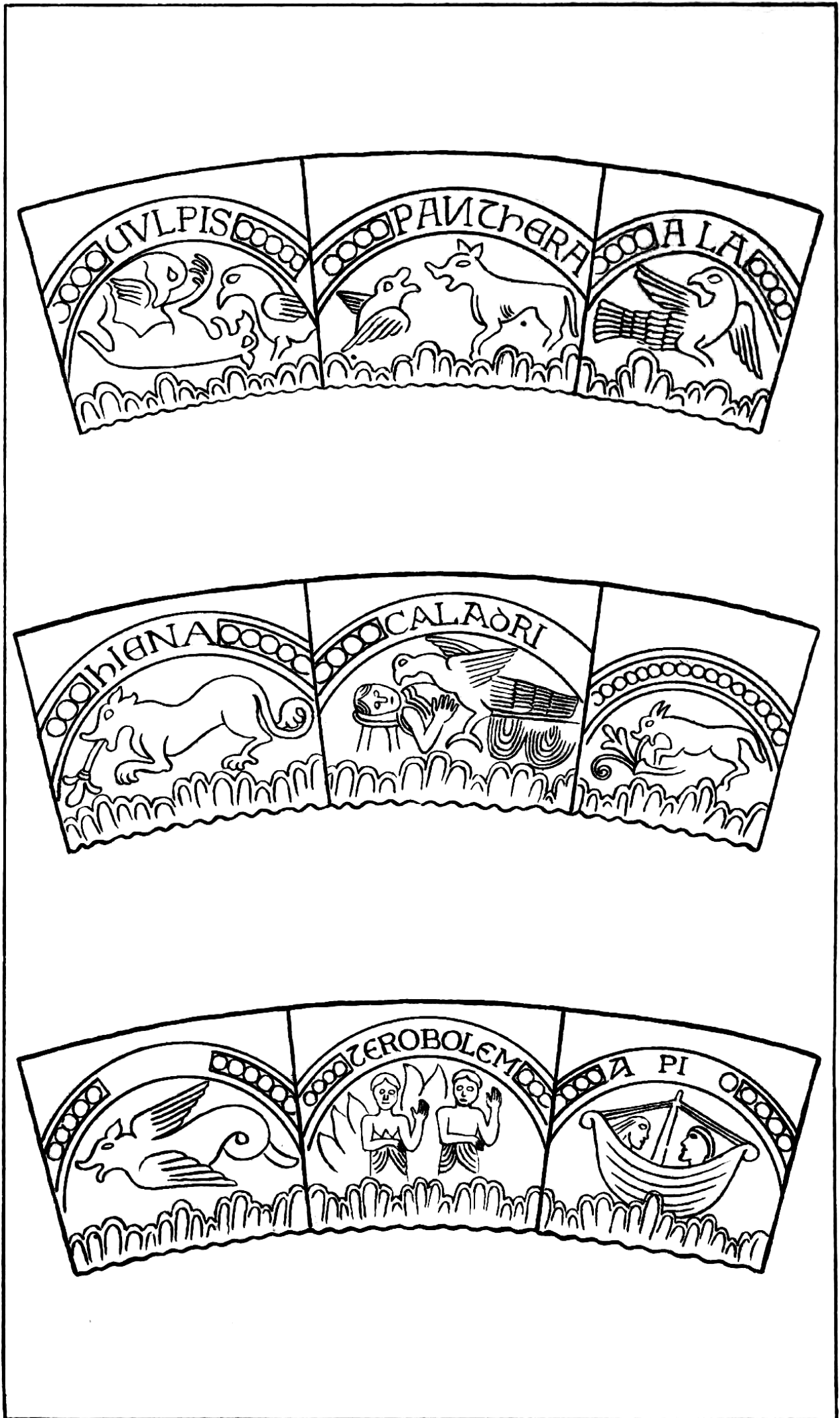
Each of the twelve months in the calendar has a page to itself, containing a list of the festivals of the Church, Saints' days, and other matters. The illuminations consist of the sign of the Zodiac belonging to the month, placed within a small circular medallion at one corner of the page, and a picture extending across the top or bottom, illustrating the agricultural occupation of the season of the year.

---

\* See list given in description of Font at Tissington in the *Reliquary* New Series, vol. i. p. 24.

† Thos. Wright's "Popular Treatises on Science during the Middle Ages."

‡ Julius A. vi. and Tib. B. v., illustrated in Strutt's "Horda" and Shaw's "Dresses and Decorations of the Middle Ages."



SCULPTURED ARCH STONES OF DOORWAY AT ALNE.

Sometimes a complete series of the signs of the Zodiac and months is used in the decoration of a church, as on the leaden Norman font at Brookland, in Kent,\* but it is more common to find a few only represented, mixed with subjects taken from other sources. Thus on the inner arch moulding of the doorway at Alne we have two of the signs of the Zodiac, Scorpio and Capricornus; and one of the months, December, the usual occupation by which this season of the year is indicated being pig killing. The Norman sculptors seem to have been fond of variety, as there are many other instances where a few isolated signs of the Zodiac are combined with the symbols of the Evangelists,\* the Agnus Dei, and animals, without any apparent connection existing between them. A preference also appears to have been shown for particular signs, such as Pisces and Sagittarius, which occur with much greater frequency than any of the others. We shall have more to say on this subject on a future occasion.\*

The outer arch moulding of the doorway at Alne is composed of nineteen stones, on each of which is sculptured an animal or other figure under a small segmental arch, having an inscription in Latin capitals in the centre, and ornamented with a row of pellets at each side. The inscriptions and subjects are as follows (Plate XXIII.):—

1. VULPIS—The fox lying on its back, with its paws in the air and its mouth wide open, pretending to be dead, whilst two birds approach dangerously near to the crafty beast, heedless of their coming doom.

2. PANTHERA—The Panther, with its enemy the Dragon staring it in the face.

3. A (QU) ILA—The Eagle, with outspread wings, and the head turned back looking over the shoulder.

4. HIENA—The Hyæna, with a floriated tail, and holding a plant (?) in its mouth.

5. CALADRI (US)—The Caladrius, a bird, perched on the bed of a sick man, gazing into his face, thus foretelling his speedy recovery.

6. No inscription. An animal devouring a plant.

7. Modern restoration.

8. Defaced.

9 to 14. Modern restorations.

15. Inscription illegible. A winged Dragon, with looped tail.

16. TEREBOLEM—The Terebolem, or two stones which emit fire, represented as a male and female figure enveloped in flames.

17. Defaced.

18. ASPIDO—The whale called Aspido-chelone. Two men in a ship, the sea monster below being omitted from want of space.

19. Defaced.

We have here a series of subjects taken directly from a Latin

\* "Jou. Brit. Archæol. Inst.," vol. vi. p. 159.

† As on the west doorway at Iffley, Oxfordshire.

‡ The months and Zodiac are fully discussed in papers by Mr. James Fowler, F.S.A., and Mr. Brown, F.S.A., in vol. 47 of the "Archæologia."

Bestiarium, or book of beasts, the inscriptions leaving no doubt whatever as to the meaning of each of the sculptures. This may appear rather a bold statement to anyone unacquainted with the literature of the middle ages, but I shall endeavour to show that the representations upon the doorway at Alne correspond exactly with the illustrations and descriptions to be found in the bestiary MSS. of the 12th and 13th centuries. Up to the present time English archæologists have paid very little attention to the study of those mediæval treatises on the various branches of zoological, botanical, and mineralogical science known as bestiaries, or books of beasts; volucraries, or books of birds; herbals, or books of herbs; and lapidaries, or books of stones. It is difficult to understand why such valuable sources of information should have been so neglected. What little has been written on the subject in English lies buried in the transactions of learned societies, and has never been made accessible to the general public. Those authors who have thought it worth while to investigate the question have looked at it entirely from its literary side, and the influence of the bestiary on ecclesiastical art has not been considered. A very good summary of the history of the bestiary will be found in the article—"Physiologus," by Prof. J. P. N. Land, in the 9th edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," and a list of several of the best of the illustrated MSS. is given in W. de Gray Birch and H. Jenner's "Early Drawings and Illuminations in the British Museum." Those who wish to pursue the subject further should consult MM. Cahier and Martin's "Mélanges d'Archéologie;" M. C. Hippeau's "Bestiaire Divin;" and Thomas Wright's "Popular Treatises on Science during the Middle Ages."

The Physiologus or Bestiary consists of a series of descriptions of animals, derived in the first instance from Pliny's "Natural History" and other sources, with a moral attached, showing how the habits and characteristics of each creature may be used allegorically for the purpose of religious teaching. In order to understand this system of spiritualised science, it must be remembered that the early Christians looked upon this world chiefly as a preparation for the world to come, and therefore thought that their physical surroundings were only worth enquiring into so far as they threw light on a future life. The minds of the early teachers of Christianity were, naturally, drawn to the subject of zoology, by having to comment on certain portions of the Bible, such as the list of clean and unclean beasts given by Moses, and the description of the six days of creation in Genesis; treatises on which, under the title of the "Hexaëmeron,"\* were at one time very popular. The use of animals for purposes of symbolism is common both in the Old and New Testaments, and it is not therefore surprising that the system of mystic zoology should have been adopted and amplified by the commentators. The spiritualised mineralogy or lapidary, which is generally included in the same volume as the bestiary, was probably originally suggested

---

\* As for example those by St. Basil, St. Eustathius, and St. Ambrose.

by the twelve precious stones on Aaron's breast-plate (Exod. xxviii.),\* and those forming the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. xxi.). It has not yet been ascertained at what period or by whom the first bestiary was composed, but at a synod of Pope Gelasius, in A.D. 496, censure was passed on the "Liber Physiologus, qui ab hæreticis conscriptus est et B. Ambrosii nomine signatus, apocryphus." All the versions of the bestiary are copied from one original, but the number of animals described and their arrangement vary, many additions and alterations having been made from time to time. The MSS. at present existing date from the 8th to the 16th century—the greatest number belonging to the 13th and 14th—and illustrated copies are preserved in almost all the great libraries, both in this country and abroad. The Bestiary has been translated into many different languages, the following being a list of the principal versions, the texts of which have been published:—

*Greek*—Late MSS. only in existence, although very probably the original Bestiary was written in this language. Text of two Greek MSS. of 14th century, Nos. 390 and 929 in the Paris Library, given by E. Legrand in "Le Physiologus, poëme sur la nature des animaux," Paris, 1869. Text of spurious Bestiary in Greek, attributed to St. Epiphanius, given by Ponce de Leon in "Ad Physiologum," Antwerp, 1588, with copperplate illustrations.

*Latin*—Physiologus of Theobald, two MSS. assigned by Sinner (Catalogue of Bern Library) to the 8th and 9th century, in the Public Library, at Bern, in Switzerland. Text of these and another MS. of 10th century at Brussels, given in Cahier and Martin's "Mélanges d'Archéologie." Text of Latin Physiologus, without morals, from a MS in the Vatican Library, at Rome, given by Mai, "Classicorum Auctorum e Vaticanis Codicibus editorum," vol. 7, p. 589.

*Anglo-Norman French*—Metrical translation of Philippe de Thann (*circa* A.D. 1121). MSS., British Museum (Nero. A v., Arund. 230, and Slo. No 1580); others in the Vatican Library at Rome, at Petau, and at Lincoln Cathedral. Text given in Thos. Wright's "Popular Treatises on Science during the Middle Ages." London, 1841.

*Norman French*—Metrical translation of Guillaume, Clerc de Normandie (*circa* A.D. 1208). MSS., eight copies in the Paris Library; two in the British Museum (Vesp. A. vii., and Roy. 16 E. viii.); and one in the Bodleian Library, at Oxford. Text given in M. C. Hippeau's "Le Bestiaire Divin," reprinted from the "Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie," vol. xix. Paris, 1851.

*French (Romance Dialect)*—Prose version of Pierre, a priest of Picardy (*circa* A.D. 1200). MSS. of 13th century in the Arsenal Library, and of 14th in the Imperial Library, at Paris. Text given in Cahier and Martin's "Mélanges d'Archéologie."

---

\* See St. Epiphanius, "De xii. Gemmis, etc.," Rome, 1743; Sir J. Mandeville, "Le Lapidaire du xivme siècle," Vienne, 1862; St. Hildebert of Tours, "De duodecim Patriarchis allegorice per lapides, etc."

*Anglo-Saxon*—Fragments in the “Codex Exoniensis,” in the Library of Exeter Cathedral. Text published by B. Thorpe for the Society of Antiquaries. London, 1842.

*English*—13th century Bestiary MS., British Museum (Arund., No. 292). Text published by R. Morris, for the Early English Text Society, in “An Early English Miscellany.” London, 1872.

*German*—Translated into old High German prose before the year 1,000, and subsequently into verse. Text edited by Von der Hagen.

*Icelandic*—13th century MS. at Copenhagen. Text given in Th. Möbius’ “Analecta Norræna.” Leipzig, 1877.

*Syriac*—12th century MS. at Leyden. Text given in J. P. N. Land’s “Anecdota Syriaca.” Leyden, 1862. Text of Vatican MS. given by O. G. Tychsen, “Physiologus Syrus.” Rostochii, 1795.

*Arabic*—MS. at Paris. Text given in J. P. N. Land’s “Anecdota Syriaca.”

*Armenian*—13th century MS. at Paris. Text given in Cahier and Martin’s “Nouveaux Mélanges d’Archéologie,” and Dom J. B. Pitra, “Spicilegium Solesmense.”

*Æthiopic*—MS. at London and Paris. Text given by Dr. F. Hommel, “Die aethiopische ubersetzung des Physiologus, etc.” Leipzig, 1877.

If space permitted, it would be a most interesting research to trace the history of the Bestiary through its various phases, and to show its effect on contemporary literature.\* It must suffice at present to observe that the Bestiary stories survived the invention of printing, and are found incorporated in such books as the “Speculum Naturale,” of Vincent of Beauvais, and the “Dialogus Creaturum,” of which there are several editions. Even in the 16th and 17th centuries, the writers on “Emblems” did not neglect this source of inspiration.† With regard to the influence of the Bestiary on contemporary literature, it may be mentioned that Chaucer quotes the Physiologus in his Nonne Prestes Tale, and Lyly (“Euphues ed Arber,” p. 149) compares flatterers to “Panthers, which have sweete smel, but devouring mind,” in allusion to the story of the panther told in the Bestiary. No doubt many other instances of a similar kind might be adduced. It is curious that although most of the Bestiary has been entirely forgotten a few of the symbols derived from it, such as the Pelican‡ and the Phoenix, are still used, and their meaning understood.

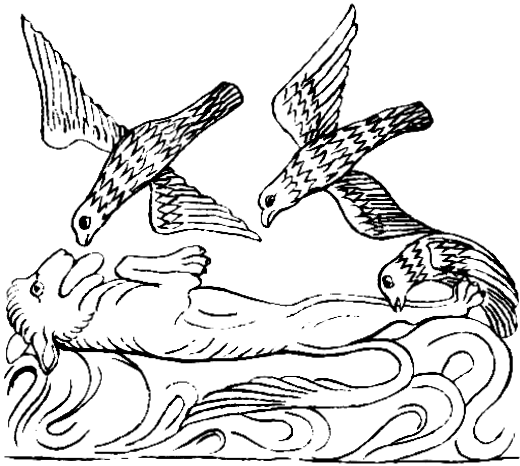
Having seen how largely the Bestiary affected medieval literature throughout a long period, it is only reasonable to expect to find traces of its existence in early Christian art, as applied to the decora-

\* The Bestiary stories are used for secular purposes in the “Bestiaire d’Amour” of Richard de Fournival (published by C. Hippeau, Paris, 1860).

† See Shakespeare and the Emblem writers.

‡ The Pelican occurs on the coat of arms of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, the inscription being

“Signat avis Christum qui sanguine pascit alumnos,  
Lilia virgo parens intemerata refert.”



FOX



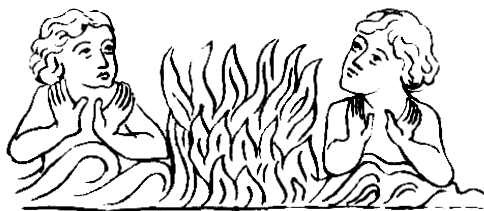
PANTHER



HYENA



CALADRIUS



TURROBOLEN



WHALE

tion of ecclesiastical buildings. MM. Cahier et Martin were, I believe, the first to call the attention of archæologists to the matter, and in their "Monographie de la Cathedrale de Bourges," several engravings are given of 13th century painted glass windows at Bourges,\* Tours, Lyons, and Le Mans, where scenes from the Passion of our Lord are surrounded by types taken partly from the Old Testament and partly from the Bestiary. Thus on one of the windows at Bourges the Resurrection is symbolised by the raising of Jairus' daughter, Jonah delivered from the whale, the Pelican bringing its young to life with the blood from its breast, and the Lion breathing into the face of its cub to bring it to life. At Strasbourg Cathedral† is a series of 14th century sculptures of a similar kind, where subjects taken from the Bestiary and the Bible are mixed together.

Upon the doorway at Alne we have an inscribed Bestiary in stone of much earlier date than the one at Strasbourg. From an archæological point of view it is of the highest possible value, as proving conclusively that the mystic zoology of the Physiologus was perfectly understood by the clergy of England in the 12th century, and subjects taken from it were considered quite appropriate for the decoration of an ecclesiastical building. It is only our ignorance of the literature of the Middle Ages which has caused us to look upon these curious representations of beasts as mere grotesques. The following explanations of the sculptures at Alne, taken from the Bestiary, (Plate XXIV.), will show that a deep spiritual meaning underlies the whole:—

VULPIS—The Fox has throughout all ages been held up as an example of cunning, treachery, and deceit. These qualities are objectionable enough in the abstract, but are still more so when used against ourselves. The medieval moralist therefore singles out for special condemnation the ruse by which the wily animal is enabled to rob the monastic hen-roost. The fox lies on his back and pretends to be dead, thus deceiving the unwary fowls, who, when they approach sufficiently near, are snapped up and devoured. The fox resembles the devil. To sinners he appears to be dead, but should they incautiously come within his clutches, he kills them body and soul. The texts quoted in the Bestiary are Psalm lxiii. 9, Song of Solomon ii. 15, Matthew viii. 20, and Luke xiii. 31.

On the carved *misereres* at Boston, in Lincolnshire, Ludlow, Herefordshire, and elsewhere, the fox is represented dressed as a priest preaching to the geese.

PANTHERA—The Panther is a beautiful animal with a variegated skin, like Joseph's coat of many colours. When this animal has eaten it retires to its den to sleep for three days, after which it comes forth, and a very sweet smell issues from its mouth. All the other animals except the dragon are attracted by the smell, and assemble round the panther. The dragon alone, who hates it, will be seized with great fear and fly from the smell. The panther signifies

\* Copied in Twining's "Symbols and Emblems of Christian Art," p. 22.

† Illustrated in Cahier et Martin's "Nouveaux Mélanges d'Archéologie."

Christ, who attracts all men towards Him by the sweet odour of His commands. The dragon is the devil, who hates Christ.

The only text quoted is that from Hosea v. 14, which is rendered "Factus sum sicut leo domui Juda, et sicut panthera domui Ephraim."

The description of the variegated skin and sweet smell of the panther is to be found in Pliny's "Natural History."

**AQUILA**—The Eagle is the king of birds, and can look straight at the sun without blinking. It bears its young up towards heaven, and compels them to gaze at the sun. Those which can bear the light without flinching it cherishes, but the ones that cannot do so it refuses to bring up. The eagle when old renews its youth by dipping itself three times in a fountain of clear water.

The eagle signifies Christ, who dwells on high, and can gaze upon God without being blinded. The renewal of the youth of the eagle is typical of baptism. The texts on which the allegory is founded are Deut. xxxii 11, and Psalm ciii. 5.

The description of the eagle causing its young to look at the sun is from Pliny.

**HYENA**—The Hyæna is both male and female. It inhabits tombs and devours dead bodies.

The hyæna signifies the Jews, the covetous, the luxurious, and other persons of a double or unstable mind.

Ctesias is the authority for the hyæna being of two sexes, and Pliny says that it is the only animal which devours dead bodies.

The only text quoted is Jeremiah xii. 9, the word "speckled bird" in our version being rendered "hyæna."\*

The hyæna is mentioned in the list of unclean beasts in the Apocryphal Epistle of Barnabas (ch. ix. 8).

**CALADRIUS**—The Caladrius is a bird found in the country of Jerusalem. It is perfectly white all over, and possesses the power of foretelling the death or recovery of anyone who is ill. If the caladrius looks towards the sick man it is a sign that he will regain his health, but if the bird turns away from him he will surely die. When the caladrius looks towards the sick man it draws the infirmity out of him to itself, and then flies up towards the sun to get rid of the disease.

The caladrius signifies Christ, who is free from all blemish of sin. Our Lord came down from heaven to save the Jews, but He averted His face from them and turned towards the Gentiles, taking our infirmities upon Him and bearing our sins.

The caladrius is mentioned by Aristotle (Bk. ix. ch. 2), but without any reference to the property described in the Bestiary. The allegory appears to have its origin in the texts which speak of God

---

\* Many errors in the Bestiary are due to mistranslations founded on similarity of the sound of the Hebrew words to the names of beasts in other languages. Mistakes also arose from confounding one species of animal with another, owing to an imperfect knowledge of natural history, and from believing that certain creatures mentioned in the Bible were intended for fabulous beings of classical origin, such as satyrs, centaurs, etc.

as looking towards us (Ps. lxxx. 7) or turning away His face from us (Ezek. vii. 22).

**TEREBOLEM**—Two stones called Terebolem are found on a mountain in the East. One resembles in form a beautiful woman, and the other is shaped like a man. When the two stones come together fire is produced and the whole mountain consumed.

The two stones which emit fire are symbolical of sexual love. Perhaps the story may be traced back to the works of Ctesias.

**ASPIDO-CHELONE** — The whale is a great monster called Aspido-chelone, who dwells in the ocean. It spreads the sand of the sea over its back, and raising itself above the surface of the water remains perfectly still, so that the seafarers mistake it for an island. The sailors anchor their ships and go ashore on the false land, but as soon as they have lighted their fires for cooking, the whale, feeling the heat, takes a sudden plunge, and they are all drowned.

The whale signifies the devil, who, when he has deluded us into false security by means of the pleasures of the world (*i.e.*, the sand on the whale's back), without any warning drags us down to hell.

Some versions of the Bestiary attribute to the whale the same property of having a sweet-smelling breath that is given to the panther, but in this case it is used to lure small fish to their doom, instead of to attract all animals.

The story of the whale has found its way into the legendary life of St. Brandan, and into the history of Sinbad the Sailor in the "Arabian Nights."

*The Dragon.*—One of the sculptures at Alne represents a dragon with a looped tail, but the inscription over it is entirely obliterated. The dragon is not amongst the creatures described separately in the Bestiary, but it is referred to in the stories of the panther, the elephant, and the arbor peredexlon. In all cases the dragon is the devil.

The antipathy existing between the elephant and the dragon is mentioned in Pliny's "Natural History," and this is used for the purpose of pointing a moral in the Bestiary. Wonderful adventures with dragons are recorded in the "Romance of Alexander."\*

On the abacus moulding on the right side of the doorway at Alne a mermaid is sculptured. This subject will be treated of subsequently.

---

\* For stories from the Bestiary found in the Romance of Alexander see Jules Berger de Xirrey, "Traditions Tetralogiques," Paris, 1836.