

EQUESTRIAN AQUAMANILES

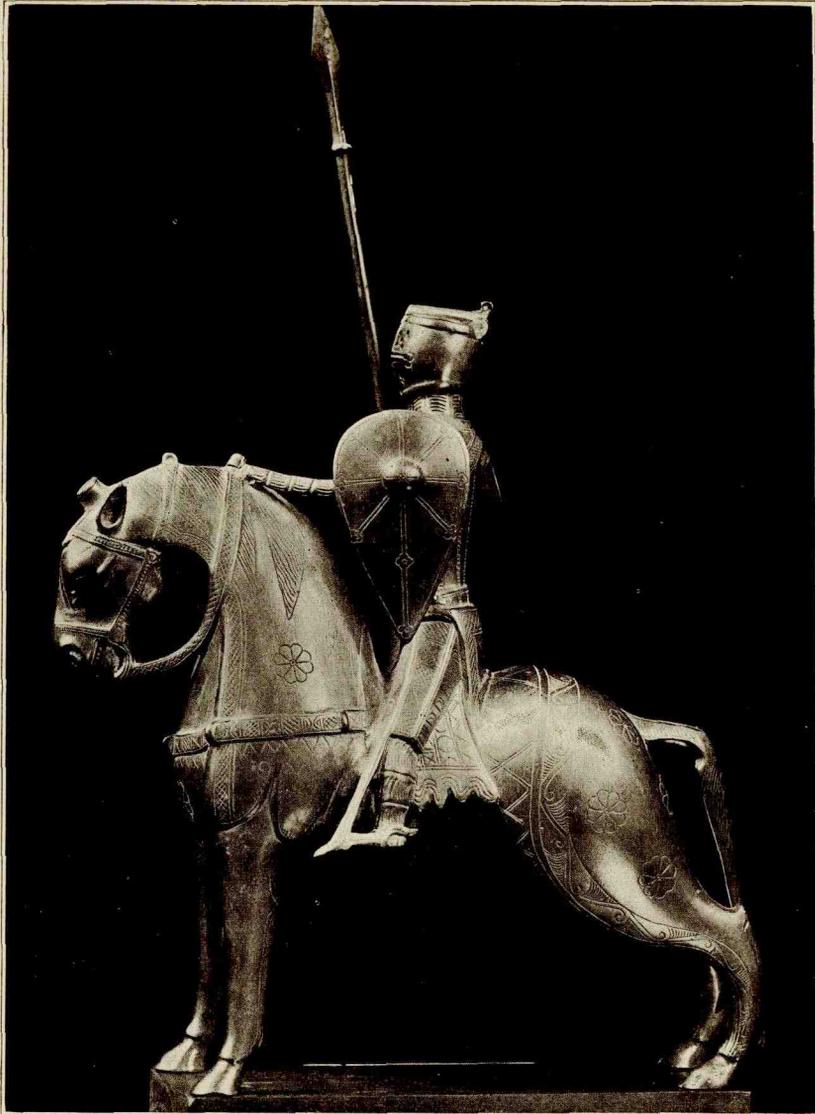
By Philip Nelson, M.D., F.S.A.

Read 11th February 1915

BY the courtesy of the Museum Committee of the Warrington Corporation I am enabled to illustrate the extremely rare aquamanile, formerly in the collection of the late Dr. J. Kendrick of Warrington. Before passing on to the consideration of this object and of other specimens, I think it would be as well to consider briefly the origin and purpose of these vessels.

During the Middle Ages the table practices of the people were not such as would obtain in polite society to-day; in fact, like the natives of a certain island, it might have been said of them, "Manners none, habits beastly." Throughout this period forks were almost unknown, save for the eating of fruit, Piers Gaveston having no less than sixty-nine spoons but only four forks;¹ in fact, it was not until the seventeenth century that their employment became at all general. The hand and dagger being employed in the eating of meat, and two people not infrequently using but one platter, it was very necessary that there should be frequent ablutions. For that purpose water, usually scented, was handed round in shallow metal bowls adorned with enamelled work of a sacred or secular character, during the change of courses, which bowls, since they were

¹ "pour mangier poires."—Rymer's *Fœdera*, iii. p. 392.



1. FROM THE CARRAND COLLECTION, FLORENCE,

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2A. AN ENGLISH PRINCE
(Carrand Collection, Florence)

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2B. AN ENGLISH PRINCE
(Carrand Collection, Florence)

made in pairs, were termed *gemellions*. The scented water was contained in vessels termed aquamaniles, which frequently took the form of grotesque animals, such as we find in the *Bestiaries*, the rarest style being that depicting a mounted figure clad in armour, and it is with this latter class that we are more immediately concerned.

It has been suggested that the fluid was poured over the hands of the diners as they sat at meat; but when we remember the weight of the vessels, in the case of the Hereford aquamanile no less than twelve pounds, it would appear more probable that these heavy vessels stood either upon the dressoir or table, their contents being decanted as occasion required.

These early water-carriers were made of a composition termed *latten*, formed by mixing copper and zinc, and were therefore what we should describe as of brass rather than of bronze. The greater number of the equestrian aquamaniles are of continental origin, the valley of the Meuse in the neighbourhood of Dinant being renowned for the production of objects in metal, termed *Dinanderie*. The example found at Hexham, and now in the national museum, may on the other hand be of English workmanship; this is quite feasible when we remember the high quality of the two fine ewers of the fourteenth century, bearing inscriptions in English, which are preserved in the British Museum and in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The following contemporary references to aquamaniles in the form of horses are of considerable interest, for they very probably relate to equestrian figures similar to those which form the subject of the present paper. In the *Status Domus de Fynkall*,¹ 1397, p. cxvii, we find the following: "In aula—Item ij counterfetys cum ij lavacris ejusdem sectæ,

¹ Published by the Surtees Society.

item ij pelves magnæ cum j lavacro et j equo eneo"; whilst on p. clvi occurs: "In aula sunt item ij pelves cum ij lavacris counterfet sed veteres. Item j lavacrum eneam et aliud in forma equi."

The following are the examples which I have been able to discover, arranged in their chronological order:

1. In the Carrand Collection in the Royal National Museum at Florence is an excellent example of an equestrian aquamanile, which measures $12\frac{5}{8}$ inches high by $11\frac{5}{8}$ inches long. Here we see the knight in banded mail, over which is a surcoat richly engraved, holding in his left hand the reins; whilst against his side is his kite-shaped shield, the umbo of which is adorned with an eight-leaved rosette, from which radiate eight rays reaching to the edge of the shield, terminating in trefoils, and in general style not unlike one of the shields in the Charlemagne window of the thirteenth century at Chartres. The figure holds in the right hand a spear, and has upon the head a flat-topped helmet, which having the top hinged serves for the admission of fluids; and has upon his heels prick spurs. The horse, which is most richly caparisoned, stands in the same attitude as that at Copenhagen and that formerly in the Berens Collection; like them it affords exit for the contents through its forehead, as indeed is the case with all the examples under notice save two (Nos. 7 and 8). (No. 1.)

2. Perhaps the most interesting aquamanile, at least from a national point of view, is the splendid example in the Carrand Collection at Florence, which, by the kindness of the curator, Signore Giacomo Nicole, I am enabled to illustrate (No. 2A), in addition to the other two magnificent specimens from the same source. This piece, which measures $12\frac{5}{8}$ inches high by $12\frac{1}{8}$ inches long, represents a youthful warrior with long flowing curls, whose



3. THE HERFORD AQUAMANILE
(Destroyed by fire, 1828)

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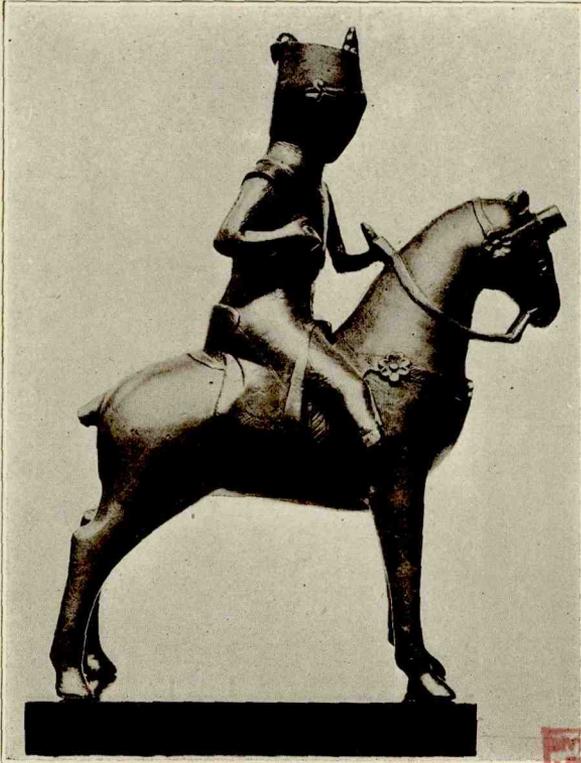
brows are encircled by a floral coronet; he is clad in chain mail, over which is a long surcoat, which reaches beyond the knees and is split up round the skirt. Upon his left hip is his sword, with a heavy pommel; in his left hand are the reins, held loosely; in his right hand he grasps a mace or sceptre, and upon his heels he wears prick spurs. He has unlaced his coif de mailles, thus exposing his head, and has withdrawn his hands from his hauberk, revealing his gambeson beneath, just as we find in the monumental brass (1306) of Sir Robert de Setvans, at Chartham, Kent. His horse, apparently a dapple-grey, this feature being indicated by cross-hatched circles engraved on the horse's skin, has hanging from its breastplate five pendant kite-shaped shields, each displaying three leopards passant, which are doubtless intended to depict the arms of England: Gules, three leopards gold. As usual the fluid finds an outlet through the forehead of the horse, and in this case the horse's bit is clearly indicated. As to who may be represented by this effigy it is a little difficult to speak with certainty; the name of Edmund Crouchback, Earl of Lancaster and King of Sicily, has been suggested; but, if this were the case, one would expect the arms of England to be differenced with a label, and in my opinion it is much more likely that we have here his elder brother, Edward I, subsequent to the death of his father, Henry III, in 1272, but prior to his coronation, which occurred in 1274. (Nos. 2A and 2B.)

3. The Hereford aquamanile, probably the largest specimen known, was formerly preserved in the College of Vicars-Choral at Hereford, where it had been for a period of upwards of five hundred years—alas! only to perish by fire, 27th July 1828. This example, now known to us only from a drawing which appeared in *The Mirror* of 1828, was of exceptional size, measuring no less than 20 inches

in height and weighing 12 lb. The knight appears to have worn complete mail, over which was a long surcoat, reaching below the knees and girt about the waist with an elaborate belt. In his right hand he carried his weapon, whilst in his left he held the reins. The horse was richly caparisoned, the saddle-cloth and harness being decorated with incised designs. The lid of the rider's helmet, hinged to admit the fluid, was lost; the contents passed out through the forehead of the horse. (No. 3.)

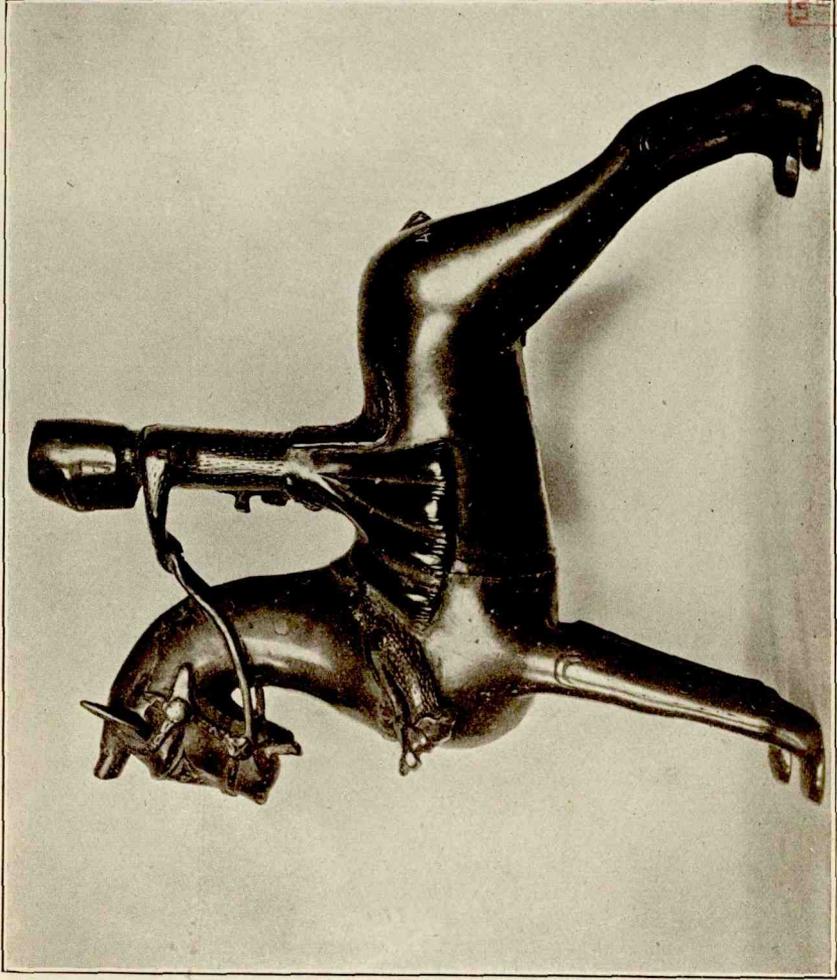
4. The Hexham aquamanile, now in the British Museum, was found in the Tyne, near Hexham; it measures $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height. The rider, whose left foot is missing, wears a surcoat reaching to the knees, incised with a diamond pattern, the divisions being decorated with alternate lys and stars. The helmet, of which the top is missing, admitted the fluid, which found exit through the forehead of the horse. The saddle is well modelled, the breastplate on the horse's chest and the bridle being adorned with rosettes. (No. 4.)

5. The aquamanile in the National Museum at Copenhagen is, like that formerly in the Berens Collection, $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, and almost identical with it as regards the tense attitude of the horse, which mannerism would seem to point to both being the product of one school. The rider is in chain mail, reinforced with genouillères, and wears round his thighs a short skirt which falls to the level of his knees; his feet, which are thrust forcibly out in front of him, bear prick spurs. He wears a helmet, the top of which, now missing, was hinged for the admission of fluid. He holds in his left hand the reins, whilst in his right hand he carries his sword, having upon the pommel a cross patée, which likewise appears on the harness. The saddle is decorated with an incised pattern. The fluid finds exit through the forehead of the horse. (No. 5.)



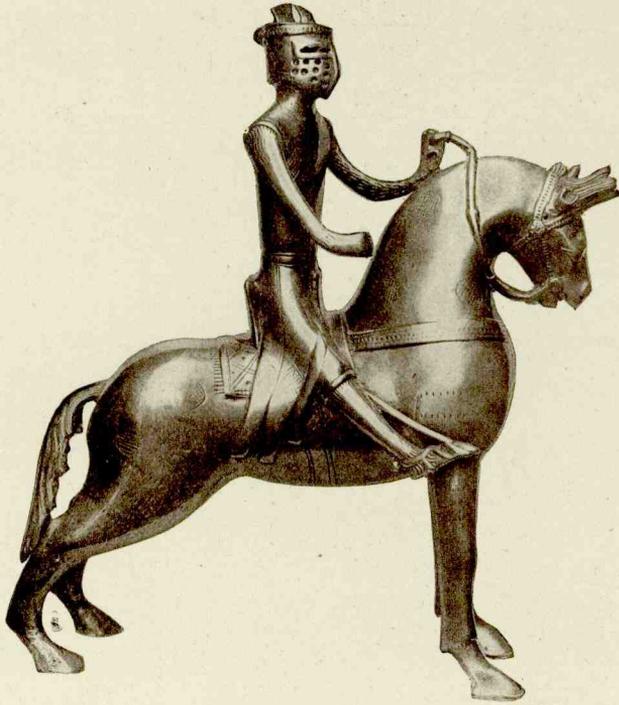
4. THE HEXHAM AQUAMANILE
(British Museum)

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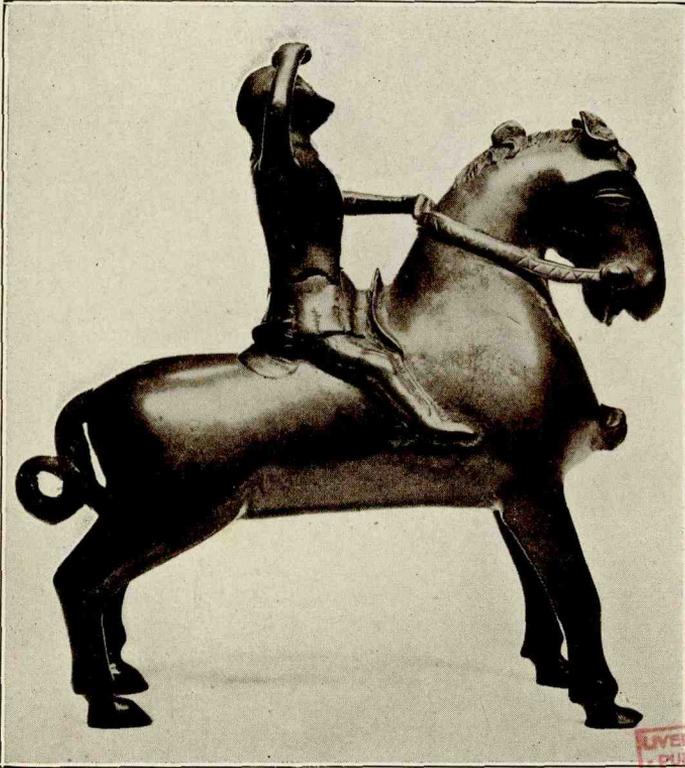
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5. FROM THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, COPENHAGEN

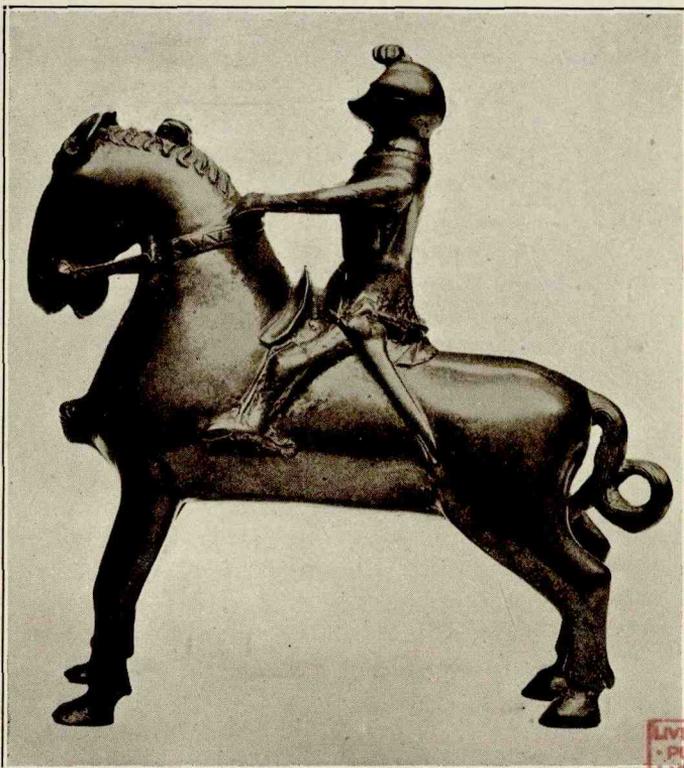


The Connoisseur

6. AN AQUAMANILE
(Formerly in the Berens Collection)



7A. THE WARRINGTON AQUAMANILE



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7B. THE WARRINGTON AQUAMANILE

6. There was formerly in the Berens Collection a fine equestrian aquamanile $14\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height. The horseman, who wears a very long surcoat split up round the skirt, had upon his head the usual type of helmet, hinged at the top for the admission of fluid. He holds in his left hand the reins, whilst with his right hand he grasped his sword, which he carried vertically in front of him. The horse is standing with its hind legs thrust well back, as is the case with the Copenhagen example, whilst its mane, carried well forward between its ears, forms the spout for the exit of the contents. The saddle-cloth and harness are lightly incised. (No. 6.)

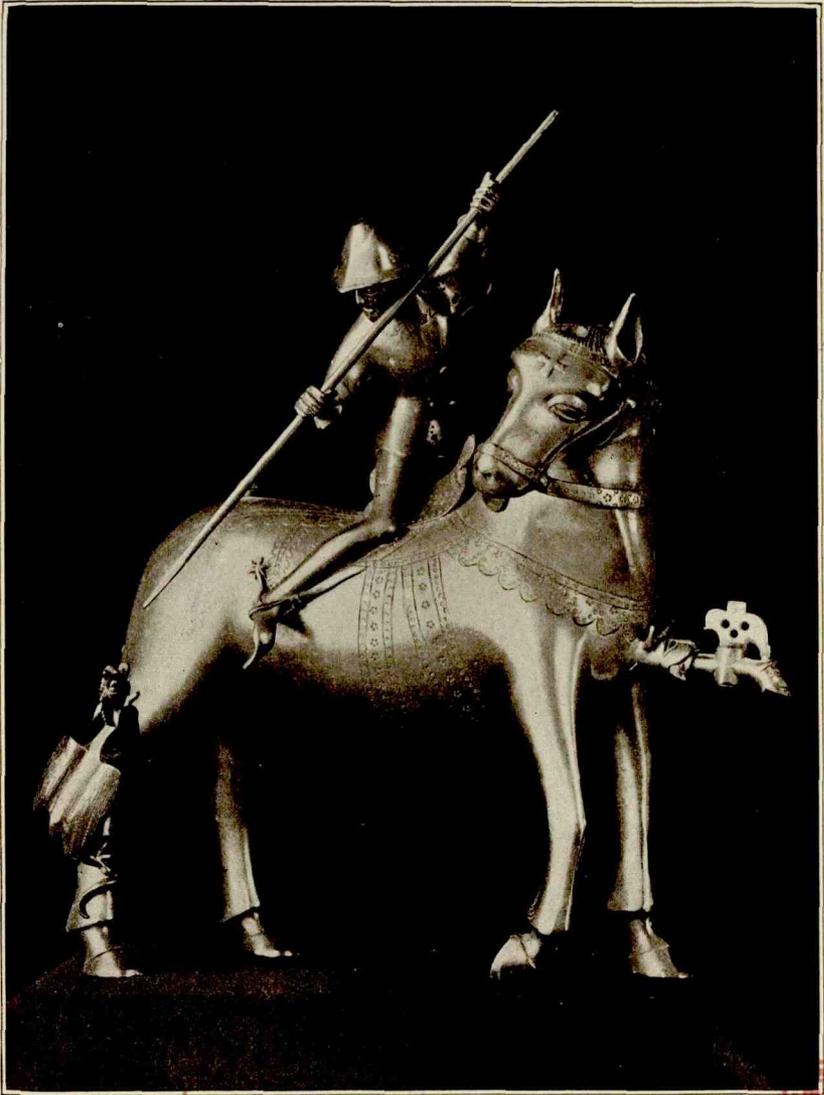
7. The Warrington aquamanile, presented to Dr. Kendrick by the Rev. E. F. Parsons of Whitley, Cheshire, is supposed to have come from Worcestershire (Nos. 7A, 7B). It weighs $4\frac{3}{4}$ lb., and is $9\frac{5}{8}$ inches long by $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. The fluid was admitted through an opening in the back of the horse's head, measuring $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch long by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide, fitted with a hinged lid, now unfortunately missing; whilst it was drawn off through a grotesque head on the horse's chest, originally provided with a metal pipe fitted with a tap, such as we see in one of the specimens in the Carrand Collection at Florence. The knight wears a globose helmet, and is in mail, the hauberk and chausses being respectively reinforced with coudières and genouillières; he also wears a short surcoat split up round the hips, which from its contour would suggest the presence of a *plastron de fer* beneath. On his left hip hangs his empty scabbard, and upon his heels are spurs with rowels; whilst in his right hand he would carry his sword, the point of which projected far behind. The saddle, stirrup-leathers, and reins are well shown, the latter being decorated with an incised chevron ornament (No. 7). The unusual arrangement for the admis-

sion of the fluid, through the head of the horse, is similar to that which occurred in the aquamanile in the form of a unicorn, exhibited in 1858 to the Royal Archæological Institute by the Rev. G. M. Nelson.

8. In the Carrand Collection at Florence there is an extremely fine aquamanile of Rhenish workmanship, of the fourteenth century, which measures 15 inches high by $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, representing St. George about to spear the Dragon. St. George wears over his armour a short surcoat with long, full sleeves, a *chapelle de fer*, and gauntlets, and has upon his heels spurs with large rowels, whilst on his left side hangs his sword. The saint, who is rising in the stirrups, is about to impale the dragon; this is represented as crawling up the off hind leg of the horse, which, with its tongue hanging from its mouth, turns its head and seems to regard the aggressor "more in sorrow than in anger." The saddle and saddle-cloth, the double girths, the halter, from which depends a cross, the reins, the scalloped breastplate, and the trappings are all richly adorned with engraving and punched ornaments. The fluid, admitted through the head of the horse, is drawn off through a tapped pipe springing from a large grotesque head on the horse's chest, as is the case with the Warrington example, which pipe terminates in a grotesque spout. (No. 8.)

9. Of the early part of the fourteenth century is an equestrian effigy of a civilian preserved in the British Museum (No. 9); whilst the Cluny Museum at Paris also contains a fine specimen of a mediæval aquamanile in the form of a horseman.

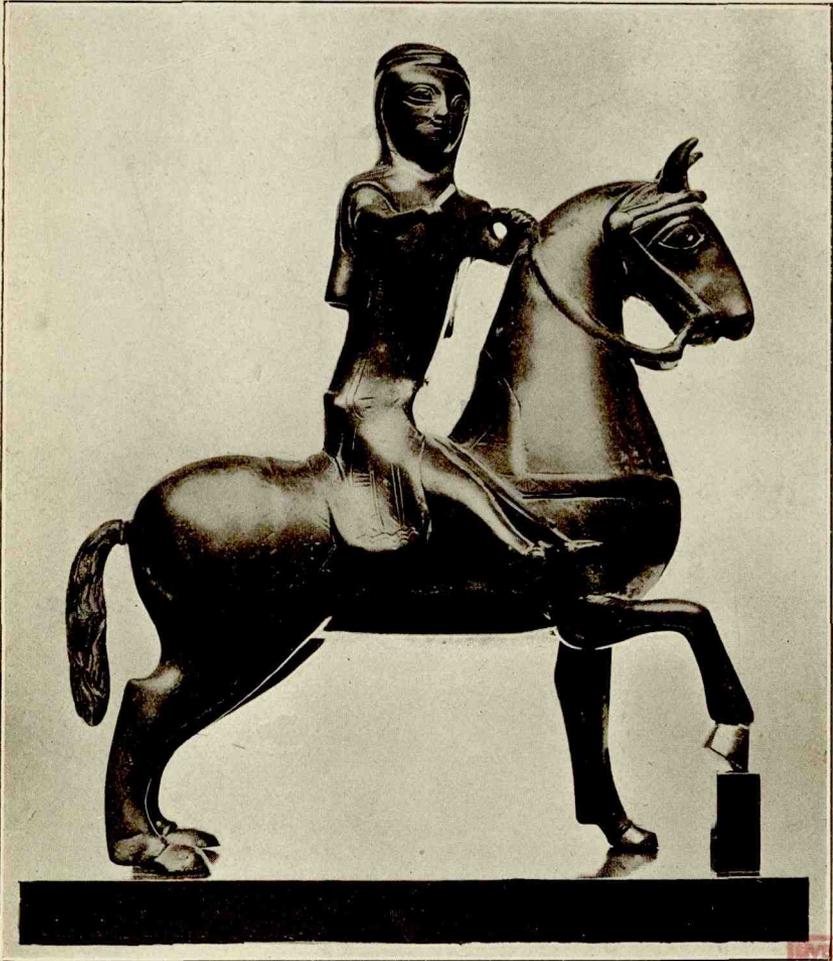
In conclusion, I must express my indebtedness to the curators of the National Museums at Copenhagen and Florence for much kind help, as also to Mr. Charles Madeley, of the Warrington Museum, and to Sir Charles H. Read, V.P.S.A., of the British Museum.



8. ST. GEORGE

(Carrand Collection, Florence)

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9. A CIVILIAN RIDER
(British Museum)

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The thanks of the Society are also due to the editors of the *Burlington Magazine* for the loan of the block illustrating the aquamanile (No. 2B), to the editor of the *Connoisseur* for permission to reproduce No. 6, and to the Museum Committee of the Warrington Corporation for the use of blocks for Nos. 7A and 7B.